From moralism to decadence : the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, 1850-70

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From Moralism to Decadence:

The Reconfiguration of Victorian Cultural Identity,

1850-70

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of Victorian cultural identity, and considers its shift from its obsession with morality early in the period, to the decadent atmosphere near the end of the century. By carefully documenting the opinions of the time as reflected in various forms of literature, I will show that not only did such a change of public attitude occur after 1850, but that it happened for two very precise but interrelated reasons – the first being a reactive response to a progressively changing world, and the second being a more contemplated response (particularly among the intellectuals) to certain fundamental values that are traditionally associated with Victorian cultural identity, which many were beginning to doubt during this time. These values, which can be regarded as institutional forms to the concept of Victorian cultural identity, I have identified as religion, morality, domesticity, and otherness. The main focus of this thesis is to show not only the importance of the period from 1850-70, in terms of its being a time when Victorian culture was trying to define itself in relation to a changing and progressively complicating world, but also the important functions of these institutional forms in regard to the conceptualisation of conventional Victorian cultural identity.

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Some of the material in Chapter 3 has been translated into Chinese and published in my article titled 'Victorian Cultural Identity and the Morality of a Nineteenth-Century English Family', *Chung Wai Literary Monthly*, 33 (2004), 125-153.

List of Illustrations

References for the illustrations used in this thesis are as follows: Plate 1, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany; 2, Peabody Essex Museum; Plate 3 to 9 are taken from Wang Jianan & Cai Xiaoli, *Postcards of the Qing Dynasty* (Beijing: China Republic University Press, 2004). In Chinese.

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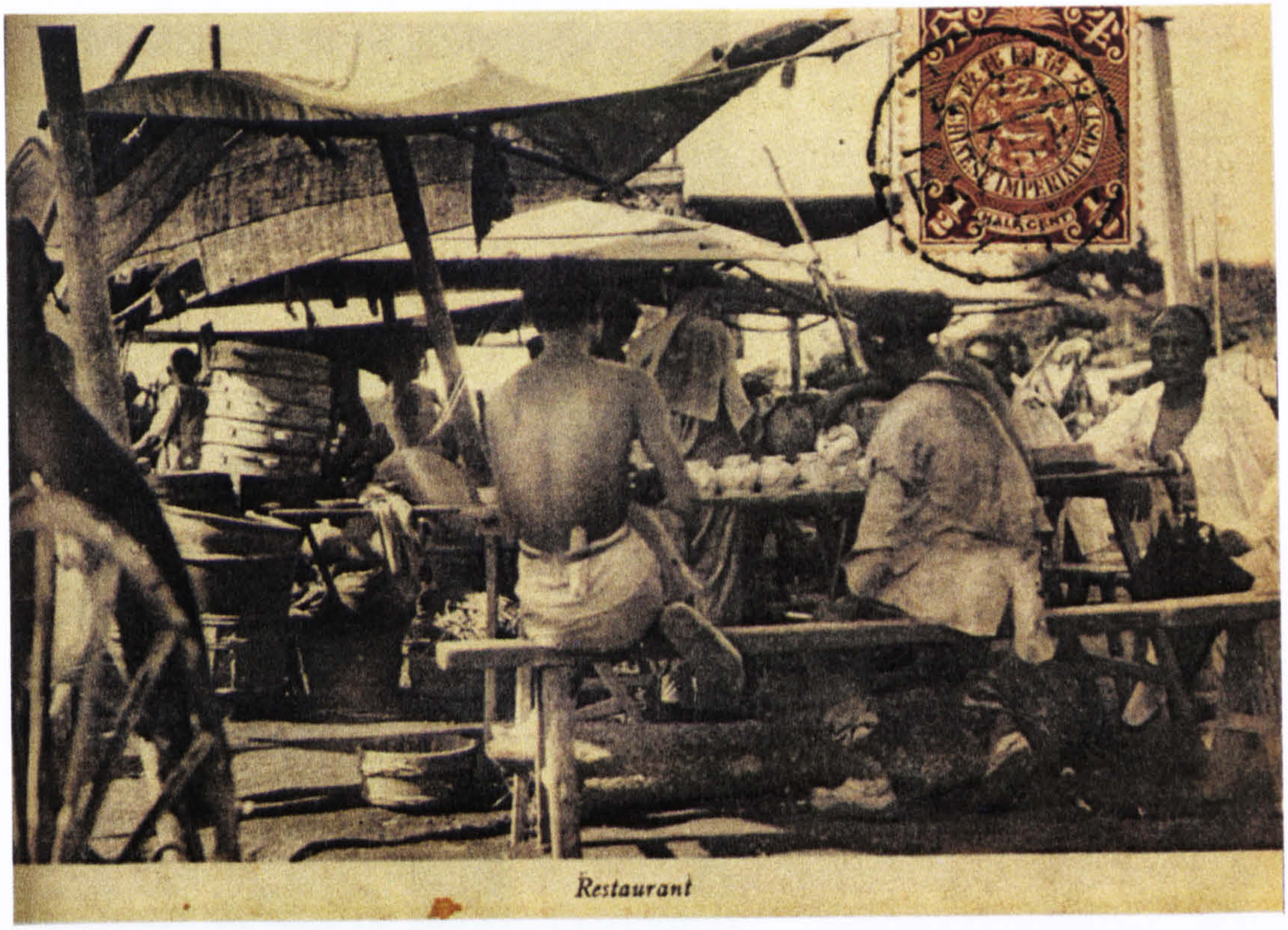

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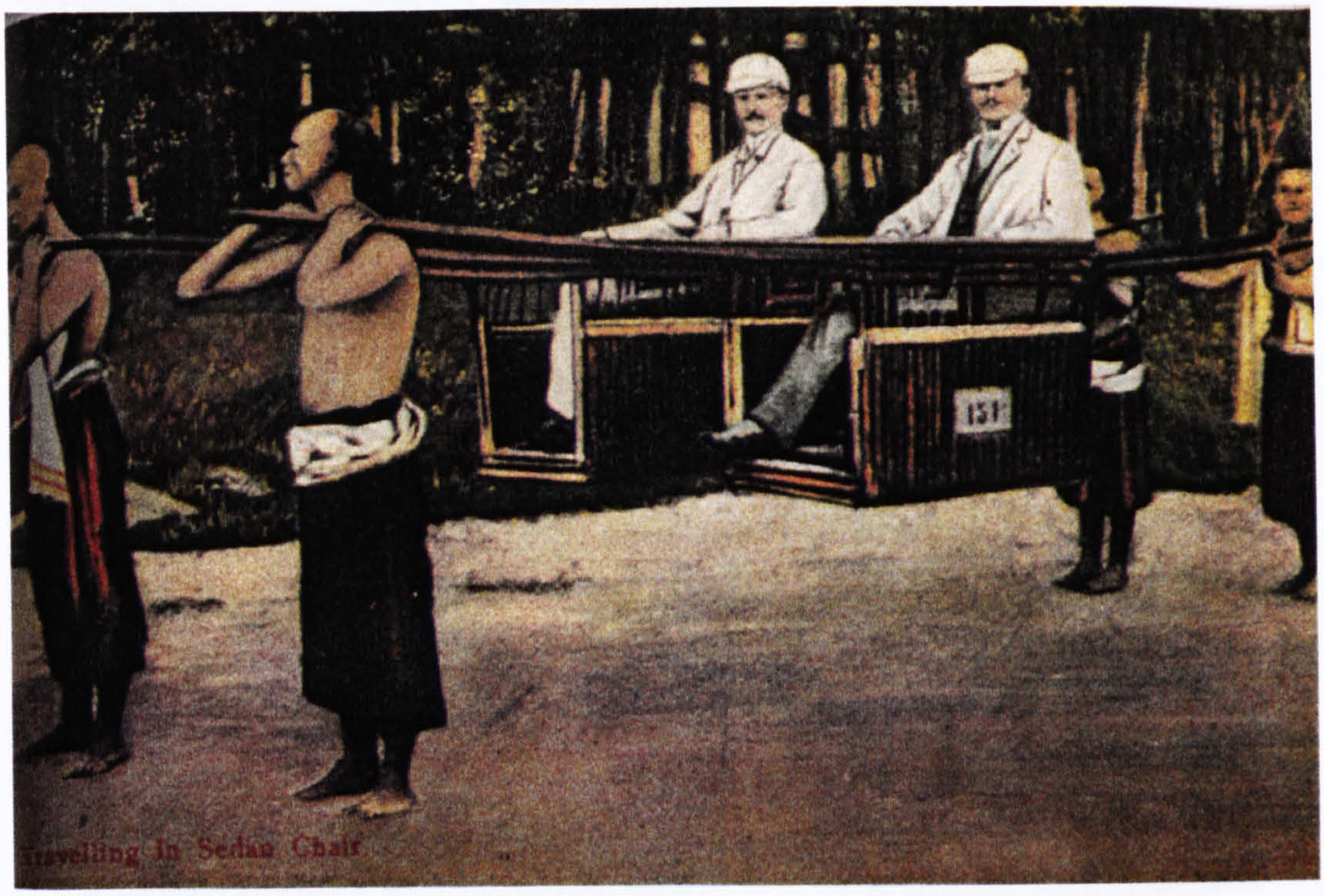

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, in particular during the period 1850-70. Consider this: the rise of the decadence movement in the 1890s, both in terms of literature and culture, is undeniably dissimilar from our conventional image of the Victorians and their middle-class 'puritan' reserve and moral ideals. However, when judging the entity which we today refer to as the 'Victorians' (including everything within a cultural, historical, and social spectrum), students often recall the sense of moral uprightness that classified the early Victorians, but only very seldom does the feeling of rebellion that defines the *fin de siècle* spirit receive consideration. To the Victorians themselves, this is also true in that the code of middle-class morality and conduct preached by Thomas Arnold in the early nineteenth century, had, by the time of Victoria's reign, been imbibed by an entire generation of Victorians, to the extent that it was regarded almost religiously as an unwritten code of conduct that the entire society (from the Queen down to a typical factory worker) would judge itself by (more on the definition of this code later).[1] This Arnoldian code of middle-class morality, thus, had in every sense of the word become synonymous with the idea of Victorian culture, and would constantly define and mould the notions of what being English and being Victorian mean. In this thesis, I intend to retrace and analyse the mid-century reconfiguration (some might even say demise) of this Arnoldian code of middle-class values as the accepted 'definition' of Victorian cultural identity. I will look at its early manifestation of high moralistic

[1] For more information on the significance of the Victorian education system, as well as its effect on the Victorians' preoccupation with the middle-class values and their presupposed sense of cultural identity, please see Raymond Williams's comprehensive study on the subject in *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961).

principles, as well as the doubts towards it which emerged shortly after 1850, leading to its eventual displacement by the decadent spirit. In *On Liberty* (1859), for instance, John Stuart Mill famously remarked that 'In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship.'[2] This burden of censorship that Mill recognises the Victorians to be living under is what the notion of cultural identity had come to represent to nineteenth century English society. It is, however, a knife that cuts both ways. Despite its obvious success in bonding society together by offering an image of a united national identity, this concept of a predisposed cultural entity, as this thesis will show, also hindered the people's ability to adapt and change as it functioned by suppressing individuality and forcing everyone to conform according to public pressure. The Dodsons from *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), who believe that identity 'consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable', [3] and perceive any behaviours outside the 'customary and respectable' way to be immoral and unacceptable, are a good example of this identity dilemma caused by the inability to express and change (I will be discussing George Eliot's view regarding Victorian cultural identity further in Chapter 3). Indeed, for individuals like J. A. Froude, Arthur Hugh Clough, and Edmund Gosse, the struggle between society's expectation of them to live up to a certain image of ideal Victorian morality and their personal longings to 'unleash' their suppressed personality and 'identity', turned out to be the root of their tormented conscience in regard to the divergence between cultural and personal identity (a point I will develop more fully in Chapter 5). I will be looking at all

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[2] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*, intro. Isaiah Berlin (1859; London: Everyman, 1992), p. 59.

[3] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (1860; London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 273.

these different degrees of cultural and identity dilemma later as manifestations of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, in order to discuss their significances from different perspectives.

For Victorian cultural identity to reconfigure itself from the Arnoldian sense of high moralism to the decadence spirit of the *fin de siècle*, the period between 1850 and 1870 represents an important point of transition. During this time, a dramatic, if not total, reversal of social perception towards its traditional middle-class ideals slowly took shape. Not only were the public's shackles of middle-class morality loosening, but in its place a sense of personal freedom and expressivity in which subjects that had previously been shunned and despised by the general public (under the influence of conventional Arnoldian middle-class doctrines), were concurrently becoming more and more a topic for open debates and social discussions. In this thesis, aside from citing examples that chart this movement that began in the 1850s, I will also demonstrate how this shift of public opinion reflects the beginning of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. This involves looking at this shift of public opinion as a significant illustration of the subconscious reaction of the Victorian public, whose notion of cultural identity was, at the time, shifting in relation to important social changes such as 'woman-worship' and Darwinism. In order to achieve this, I will examine and discuss many of the influential voices that helped spread and legitimise these changing social ideas, as well as the different models of public acceptance and resistance towards these issues.

My approach in this thesis is to engage and bring together a number of topics, often presented as independent ideas in research conducted by other scholars, with the intention of establishing a sense of interconnectivity in understanding the overall structure of Victorian cultural identity. Such 'topics', which I will refer to

as 'institutional forms' and which I will discuss at length later on, include religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness and can be thought of as building blocks to the concept of Victorian cultural identity.

While others in the past have addressed these topics in detail (for example, in *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said has meticulously demonstrated how the West's concept of otherness is instrumental in shaping its own cultural image),[4] they were in general unable to take into account the complexity of an issue as intricate as cultural identity, which could not have been the product of any single realm of thought. Therefore, without laying any claim to absolute comprehensiveness,[5] this thesis importantly synthesizes the work of other critics to shed light on the topic of Victorian cultural identity afresh. By bringing together all these different realms of Victorian scholarships to form an incorporative study, a more comprehensive and critical assessment of the cultural and political diversity behind the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity will be established.

In terms of primary texts, I have found the criticisms of some Marxist and Reader-response scholars to be helpful in identifying and defining the relationship between texts and the issue of cultural identity. For example, in *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests that a literary work does not appear to the world as a finished and polished product, but instead depends on the reader's historical and social background to interpret it and give it 'meaning and significance'.[6] Having adopted this view, in order to discover the 'meaning and significance' of contemporary texts in their original Victorian context, I will not only be

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[4] See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978; London: Penguin, 1995).

[5] I must stress the fact that the institutional forms discussed in this thesis represent only the four *most influential* factors (certainly not all) in the shaping of Victorian cultural identity. There are no doubt other less important elements in the makeup of Victorian cultural identity which, due to the confinement of time and space, this thesis simply cannot deal with.

[6] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel, ed. John Cumming & Garrett Barden (1975; London : Sheed and Ward, 1989).

examining personal reactions to particular texts at the time, but also contemporary criticism that responds to both the text and the entire genre of which the text is considered to be a part. Such an approach requires us to keep in mind that a literary text does not represent objects, but refers to the extra-literary world by operating within a certain set of predisposed social norms, values and world-views. Thus, by looking at the contemporary critics' reasoning on whether they agree or disagree with a particular text, I will be able to determine the extent to which the Victorians were influenced by their subconscious attachment to Victorian cultural identity. Another Marxist critic, Louis Althusser, describes this concept as a process of 'social formation' that contains a two-fold quality, that while the fabricated concept of cultural identity contains no governing principle, social unity, or originating seed, it is at the same time believed by the public to be a fundamental doctrine of the very fabric of society.[7] In other words, cultural identity co-exists alongside society on a dialectical principle, with each being mutually defined and identified by the other, but not necessarily as a reflection of the real situation.

As I deal with the concept of institutional forms in the first four chapters of this thesis, I will be returning to this theory of cultural dialecticism to demonstrate how the Victorians were subconsciously guided by this principle in their attempt to align themselves to a certain ideal image of cultural identity. I will also demonstrate how the identity crisis after the 1860s is inadvertently triggered by the inability of this principle to reflect the real world. In order to do so, in places, rather than the content of texts themselves, this thesis attempts to use those texts as a means to retrace the paradigm that operates more broadly in the minds of

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[7] For more on the Althusser's definition of the concept of 'social formation', see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

their Victorian readers, with the point being to discover and analyse the mental fabric that is widely regarded by the Victorians themselves to be fundamental to their notion of cultural identity.

I. Englishness, Middle-class Morality, and Victorian Cultural Identity

Before we can proceed to look at and examine the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, we run into the inevitable question of 'what exactly is Victorian cultural identity?' The answer is complicated, so much so that it may appear rhetorical to some. However, despite its elusive nature, modern observers agree that such an identity did exist and was very much a part of the identity of Victorian society; although the Victorians, much like us, may not have had a very concrete idea of the definition of this identity. As G. Kitson Clark notes:

> [I]n the first quarter of the nineteenth century it was becoming increasingly clear that what was politically, socially, intellectually and spiritually a new society was growing up in England for which neither the institutions, nor the ideas, that had been inherited from the eighteenth century would suffice.[8]

Indeed, unlike any previous eras, the Victorian period is culturally different because it distinctly emits a holistic spirit of unity that gives the impression of a culture being defined by precision and rigidity. The foundation of this identity actually took root during the period between 1800 and 1837, when a process of cultural transition occurred which socially identified a set of collective

[8] G. Kitson Clard, *The Making of Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 39.

middle-class ideologies as 'Victorian'. These various middle-class ideals (cultural-high-mindedness, morality, duty, etc.) became incredibly influential because Thomas Arnold was able to fundamentally indoctrinate them into the English public school system, causing them to eventually become a definitive series of cultural representations that constructed the image of Victorian cultural identity.[9] Later in the century, when social changes along with technological progress altered English society almost unrecognisably, individuals such as Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin would constantly look back to this set of 'Arnoldian values' as the key to 'healing' what they perceived as a degenerative culture.

However, despite the apparent solace Ruskin and Matthew Arnold were able to find in such a conceptualisation of Victorian cultural identity, an unfortunate flaw lies in the essential makeup of it, which is its inability to incorporate the massive spectrum of social, economic, and scientific changes that, above all else, defined Victoria's reign. On top of that, despite what it preaches in the British education system, its fundamental root in being a set of middle-class oriented principles means that it simply does not and could not represent the entire Victorian population (which cultural identity, by definition, is supposed to do). As a result, during the middle of the nineteenth century, an unsynchronised relationship between what the early Victorians were taught to perceive as their cultural identity, and the actual situation they would find themselves to be in, developed. It essentially makes the notion of Victorian cultural identity a nostalgic idea and thus divides the nation. Some decided to resuscitate their conventional identity by continuously professing the virtue of it, while others decided to openly rebel against it. Therefore, in the following chapters, I will mainly be presenting

[9] Again, for more information, please refer to Williams, *Revolution*.

the identity conflict of the mid-Victorians as a process of self-discovery which occurred because society struggles in moving towards either direction.

At this point, it is important to reiterate the influential power of this Arnoldian notion of Victorianness to be that it was acknowledged, practised, and followed by the Victorians with almost religious devotion. Raymond Chapman, for example, points out that the period of 'Victorian childhood' in which the Arnoldian middle-class concerns for morality and respectability were being developed and deployed, would, in later years, come back to represent for many 'a time of innocence, a Romantic view which became enmeshed with the Evangelical delight in early pious deaths before the world has done its work of corruption'.[10] It is an ideal that is, furthermore, described by G. M. Young as a 'sense of being under a Code',[11] which suggests a somewhat static and simplistic nature for this identity that prophesises its own downfall because of its incompatible nature with the 'progress' of the age. This, however, did not prevent a coherent notion of cultural identity from being acknowledged by the Victorian mass. The uniform sense of action and belonging which Young recognises, for instance, points to the collective awareness of an established notion of cultural identity. This, at the very least, provides clues as to the evidential existence of Victorian cultural identity, and to what extent it is practised by the public. The actual characteristics that make up this cultural identity, however, would prove much harder to decipher.

During the nineteenth century, despite the fact that Victorian cultural identity would symbolise not just the English population, but also Britishness as a whole

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[10] Raymond Chapman, *The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 145.

[11] G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (1936; London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 2nd edn., p. 17.

(which includes Scottish, Irish, Welsh as well as to a certain extent the later incorporation of the colonies, see Chapter 4), the essence of this cultural identity remains predominantly and distinctly an English middle-class one. Raymond Williams, in *The Long Revolution*, has meticulously traced this development to Thomas Arnold and the revolution of the English public school system in the 1820s, in which the sudden influx of middle-class influence on the education system would ensure the adoption of its values and beliefs by the future society.[12] Similar results were also found by David Newsome, who suggests:

> In the nineteenth century it is especially noticeable that the middle classes, already economically powerful and – as the century progressed – increasing steadily in their political significance, were gradually displacing the aristocracy as the arbiters of taste, the guardians of morality and as the power that dictated contemporary conventions and values [...] it is clear that the pressure of middle class opinion led to the reforms of the older public schools by Arnold, the Arnoldians and others.[13]

In fact, just by looking at and examining the attitudes of the early and mid-Victorians in their writings and social habits, it would be impossible not to recognise in the wide spectrum of Victorian literature the numerous occasions where distinctly middle-class ideas are present. This includes the related ideas of behaving in a strictly moralistic and virtuous manner, the fear of God, as well as the notion of abiding by a certain structure of domesticity that rigidly defines the tasks of men and women, all of which being traceable to the teachings of Thomas Arnold. As for the reason why this distinct interpretation of Englishness was able

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[12] See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).
[13] David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1961), p. 35.

to suppress other distinctive cultural traits around the British Isles, to establish itself as the predominant manifestation of Britishness, a simple explanation is given by Patrick Brantlinger as follows:

> English national identity is older and seems bound to outlast the latecomer of British supranational identity. The later identity is dependent upon dominion over other, non-English nationalities, both within the circumference of what were once blithely called "the British Isles," and around the world [...] the only things that seemed more real and more certain to endure forever than the glorious Empire itself were the virtues of the mainly English heroes – adventurers, soldiers, rulers – who had "invented" that Empire. These were distinctly English virtues, moreover – definitely not Irish, and only occasionally (a bit grudgingly) Scottish.[14]

Indeed, early in the century, Thomas Carlyle's preaching, which was also phenomenal in the shaping of Victorian cultural identity, was of an unmistakably English middle-class nature in spite of his Scottish heritage.[15] Later in the period, this same attitude would be embraced and adopted by non-English writers as various as Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson, who advocate this quintessential English middle-class identity as if oblivious of their own roots.[16] But no matter from which angle one looks at it, it is undeniable that the set of English middle-class ideals which Arnold had rooted deep in the English pedagogic system, had by the late 1840s become established so securely as the hegemonic representation of Victorian cultural identity, that an entire generation

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[14] Patrick Brantlinger, 'Imagining the Nation, Inventing the Empire', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 23 (1996), 329-338 (p. 337).

[15] See Simon Heffer, *Moral Desperado: A Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1995).

[16] See Nick Frankel, '"Ave Imperatrix": Oscar Wilde and the Poetry of Englishness', *Victorian Poetry*, 35 (1997), 117-137.

would grow into maturity by confining itself to its rigid principles and social norms. The dilemma, however, is that by the time this English middle-class doctrine of morality had matured to the point of being perceived as representative of its culture (as spearheaded by Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, J. A. Froude, and Thomas Hughes), the world along with its interpretation of those ideas had changed to the extent that the two were no longer relatable to each other. Thus, it can perhaps be said that Victorian cultural identity began its descent into fallibility almost as soon as it peaked. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate the importance of the 1850s and 60s as a period of transition for the Victorians, when the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity occurred, which led directly to the manifestation of the decadence.

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, when the Arnoldian tradition of pedagogy had deliberately instilled into public the belief of the existence of a uniform 'culture', the notion of Victorian cultural identity seemingly sprang up from nowhere and achieved success in defining a nation. However, from a Marxist's point of view, this artificial imposition of the set of middle-class specific morality onto the greater culture would not have been feasible, unless from within one can recognise at least a grain of 'truth' in the construction of such an 'illusion'. In order to understand this better, Althusser's definition of the term 'ideology', and its relation to cultural identity, is useful. Althusser believes that:

> [W]hile admitting that [cultural identities] do not correspond to reality, i.e. that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be "interpreted" to discover the reality of the world behind their

imaginary representation of that world (ideology = *illusion/allusion*).[17]

The dialectical relationship identified by Althusser that correlates between reality and illusion/allusion, is what Victorian cultural identity relied on to function as a representation of the inherent cultural characteristics of nineteenth century England. In order for it to work, early proponents of Victorian cultural identity would have to rely heavily on an English cultural inheritance and national icons that would have been perceived as distinctly and unmistakably English. These features include their religious belief, their sense of duty, their ideas regarding domesticity, as well as the popular mentality of cultural delineation (otherwise known as 'otherness'). To a large extent, these ideas were all heavily preached and perceived to have emerged from a historically-proven English heritage throughout the nineteenth century. For example, advocates of the popular notions of domesticity would have drawn on the role of home and women in a predominately English tradition such as the works of Shakespeare (which Ruskin and others indeed do; see Chapter 3), in order to demonstrate their importance and legitimacy within the English institution. Such a mentality, according to cultural critics including Homi Bhabha, is a common but subconscious strategy employed by nations throughout history in the formation of many specific and highly politicised forms of national identity. The approach behind this form of employment of 'cultural elaboration' which 'holds culture at its most productive production',[18] according to Bhabha, is that whatever the form of identity was perceived to be, it must at the very least hold and contain a number of elements that are easily recognisable as, and accepted by, the nation as a distinctive part of

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[17] Althusser, p. 162
[18] Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 3.

its heritage. These are then elaborated in order to enlarge their significance and thus make possible the conceptualisation of a cultural identity, and enable it to serve as an identity for society to relate to. When incorporating this theory into the Victorian cultural identity, it seems true that the concept of middle-class Englishness does show evidence of containing distinctive elements like religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness, which together come to define a broader but coherent concept of Victorian cultural identity. I consider these different elements 'institutional forms' intrinsic to the concept of cultural identity. In the following chapters, I will be deciphering these four institutional forms within the structure of Victorian cultural identity in further detail, in order to explore their significance in relation to the general doubt felt by the Victorians towards conventional Victorian cultural identity. For now, it is important for us to first establish and recognise that these four institutional forms are not simply imaginary articles, and that despite their being originally an English middle-class philosophy that does not represent the entire British culture, they are nonetheless in various degrees recognisable as characteristics that are predominantly and uniquely British in nature, regardless of social status, ethnicity, and geography (Carlyle, for instance, was not hesitant about singling out Englishmen such as Shakespeare, Cromwell, and Dr. Johnson as the embodiment of his idea of the national hero, despite his own Scottish heritage).[19] The development of these four institutional forms during the early decades of the nineteenth century, as this thesis will show, is fundamentally important to the maturation of middle-class values into being accepted on a broad basis. For the time being, however, I will set aside the roles of the four institutional forms to examine in detail some of the factors that were so crucial in forming and establishing a coherent British and, ultimately, Victorian

[19] See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1852; London: George G. Harrap, n. d.).

identity in the first place.[20]

II. The Formation of Cultural Identity

Since King James's succession to the English throne in 1603, Britain had largely been a nation united in name if not always in essence. The stage for the manifestation of a united cultural identity, at least in principle, was all set. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that the presence of such a distinctive identity would take form in Britain, and that despite its rapid reconfiguration during the century, its emergence was still a subject of great cultural and historical interest. So what were the factors that helped instigate the great phenomenon of Victorian cultural identity in the nineteenth century? In this section, I will examine the rise of the notion of cultural identity in the Victorian age, and see, beyond the education reform of middle-class ideas by Thomas Arnold early in the century, what other factors were at work to help designate the nineteenth century as the historical period for the manifestation of Britishness in the first place.

Linda Colley, in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, suggests that from the mid-eighteenth century onward, an important driving force had been in place to help push the shaping of a British cultural identity that would significantly allow Britain to stand apart and identify itself as unique among the nations of the world. This 'force' that would create in the end something so predominantly

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[20] Paul Langford, in *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), has further identified myriad other factors which have influenced the formation of the English cultural identity. Their significance, however, I believe are not as imperative to the Victorians as the four listed by me, thus for the purpose of this thesis I do not intend to concentrate at length on them.

British, however, did not originate on British soil but has its roots in the turmoil that had been taking place outside the British Isles since the eighteenth century. In particular, England's prolonged uneasy relationship with France, which prior to the Victorian era would reach two separate peaks in the Napoleonic War and French Revolution, was conducive in spreading anxiety throughout Britain which ultimately would lend strength to the subconscious perception that a cultural identity was needed, and prompted Britain to consciously promote and solidify the idea of an existing cultural identity that distinguishes herself from her unwelcome neighbours.[21] Edmund Burke, for example, was representatively eloquent in regard to British-French relationship at the time, especially in his proclamation that the British should be 'standing on the firm ground of the British constitution [...] rather than attempt to follow in their desperate flights the aeronauts of France.'[22] In the first half of the nineteenth century, similar attitudes can be found in works such as Southey's *Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829), Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837), and to a lesser degree Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Furthermore, because geographically England and France are in relative proximity, the uneasiness remained distinct for the Victorians and even prompted the development of the image of Britishness into something with a strong anti-French flavour. This would explain the emphases of Victorian cultural identity on aspects such as religious devotion (which stresses Protestantism as opposed to Catholicism), the image of a moralistic and orderly society (as opposed to the perceived revolutionary chaos of France and her cities), and their domestic order (in contrast to France's vulgar sexuality as perceived by

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[21] For more information, see Linda Colley, Britons: *Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1992)

[22] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, intro. A. J. Grieve (1790; London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1955), p. 244.

the English).[23] Iain Pears, furthermore, suggests that the reason figures like the Duke of Wellington and Napoleon were so heavily mythologised and stereotyped in nineteenth century England, is due to the necessity for British identity (embodied in Wellington) to be distinguishable from the French.[24] Therefore, ironically, the French are at least partially responsible for the formation of Victorian cultural identity in the nineteenth century, which would explain Britain's seemingly too eager willingness to accept Arnoldian middle-class principles as representative of their entire culture.

Aside from England's relationship with her close neighbour, another reason for the preoccupation of Englishness during the nineteenth century can be traced to the rapid growth of the British Empire. As Edward Said has demonstrated in *Orientalism*, a perceived polarity had always existed between the cultural identities of the East and the West and, in order for Western culture to define itself, a preconceived and often biased cultural identity for the East must first be fabricated, in order to create a reference point for Western identity to be constructed upon.[25] Therefore, as the size of the British Empire (which was undeniably the most powerful imperial force at the time) grew to incorporate more and more alien lands, increased contact with foreign cultures dictates that, sooner or later, the cultural construction of the Orient would collide with the real, material facts of it, which would inevitably lead to a contradictory image of the East in the Western mind. Since the concept of otherness, based on Western distortion of the East, is so crucial to the fundamental makeup of their cultural

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[23] The image of French literature, in England during the era, was considered somewhat vulgar and immoral in particular in its portrayal of sexual themes. The reception of the works of Flaubert, George Sand, etc, is a good example of this attitude as they were continuously condemned throughout the century by the so-called 'moralistic' Victorian critics.

[24] See Iain Pears, 'The Gentleman and the Hero: Wellington and Napoleon in the Nineteenth Century', in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), pp. 216-236.

[25] See Said, *Orientalism*.

identity, such conflicting information brought back by the expansion of the empire would eventually reach a point of seriously undermining the legitimacy of the presupposed Western identity (this issue of otherness will be dealt with in greater depth in Chapter 4). In the face of such 'dangers', and in order to protect and preserve a conventional sense of cultural identity, the British instinctively retreated into their pre-existing idea about Englishness, and progressively paid more and more emphasis to this ideal. The myth of Britishness, as a result, grew so strong that it eventually provided a foundation for the monolithic image of Victorian cultural identity to be set upon. Suffice to say, this kind of conscious promotion of the idea of an existing British identity (which strives to retain its 'purity' in spite of foreign 'temptations') is important in the shaping of the notion of cultural identity during the early nineteenth century.

During the 1850s, however, political and social changes in the public's perception of both France and other Oriental places would occur. This resulted in a (subconsciously) public realisation of the conventionally flawed presumption regarding the relationship between Britishness and otherness which, alongside other issues, triggered the overall reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity in the second half of the century. We will return to this later with a more methodical and in-depth analysis on the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, via the concept of otherness, in Chapter 4.

III. The Elitist Mentality

For a number of reasons which we will discuss later, the flaw of the presumption of middle-class Englishness as a representation of the larger British culture was slowly realised after the 1850s, resulting in people beginning to question and demand change in this attitude. As has been mentioned already, Victorian cultural identity interacts with the contemporary public mainly via its four Arnoldian institutional forms, which are then interpreted subconsciously by the Victorians into forming a semi-precise image of a representative cultural identity. Because Victorian cultural identity engages the public primarily on the level of its institutional forms, its reconfiguration would, by the same token, have to come via those same institutional forms. I have identified two main reasons to explain why all four institutional forms would suffer simultaneous doubts during the 1850s. Firstly, following the arguments of Colley and Said, pre-1850 was still very much a formative period. British attitudes towards France and other nations remain unsettling, and the Empire, on its course of robust expansion, seems largely disinterested in paying much attention to the Eastern cultures it was encountering. The result is that any intrinsic flaws within the structure of British cultural identity would not have been easily detected, as long as the goal was accomplished in distinguishing the identity of Britain from the perceived 'others'. Secondly, the overwhelming achievement of Britain as an empire, as it heads into the nineteenth century, was also instrumental in preventing the emergence of any counterarguments against its presupposed cultural identity of Britishness. As Terry Eagleton has recently claimed:

> The beauty of being a ruler is that one does not need to worry about who one is,

since one deludedly believes that one already knows. It is other cultures which are different, while one's own form of life is the norm.[26]

Being a force that once claimed sovereignty over a total of a quarter of the entire globe, Britain certainly fits the description of being a *ruler*. However, aside from the theory of the formation of cultural identity in regard to otherness, what Eagleton also points out is the danger of having too exuberant a self-esteem, which often leads to the overlooking of the actual composition of the self, thus easily making one regard 'one's own form of life' as the 'norm'. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, a sense of high-esteem in one's cultural supremacy would continue to dictate British identity. As late as 1850, Macaulay, for instance, did not hesitate in his proclamation that the English 'have become the greatest and most highly civilised people that ever the world saw,'[27] and likewise Edwin Hood wrote with equal zest that 'Within the last half century, there have been performed upon our island, unquestionably, the most prodigious feats of human industry and skill witnessed in any age of time or in any nation of the earth.'[28] Furthermore, there was also a series of historical events which further fuelled this English exultancy. There was, first of all, the conquest of India and the victory of Waterloo which understandably gave Britain a sense of affirmation of her military might; the abolition of the slave trade, meanwhile, served to confirm their moralistic and religious goodness; and on the industrial front, the advent of the railway and related industrial achievements, acted like the final piece of the puzzle that completed and established a sense of cultural

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[26] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 46.

[27] Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Sir James Mackintosh', in *Critical and historical essays, contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London: Longman, 1850), pp. 305-341 (p. 305).

[28] Edwin P. Hood, *The Age and its Architects: Ten Chapters on the English People in Relation to the Times* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1852), 2nd edn., p. 138.

supremacy. These notions of difference and progress would, indeed, become so exuberant that one can literally sense the pride emanating from the Victorians (rich or poor, everybody celebrated the Great Exhibition). But lost in this environment, understandably, was the question of the essence, or the meaning, of the identity being celebrated. As Dickens would later satirise in the character of Mr. Podsnap, the attitude of the time was indeed one that would blindly indulge itself in the satisfaction of being English, one that is capable of proclaiming:

> No Other Country is so Favoured as This Country [England], [...] that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth.[29]

The sentiment depicted here by Podsnap is likely to have been a common one found in the Victorian society in those days (but the fact that in 1865, the year *Our Mutual Friend* was published, Dickens was able to mock this sentimentality openly suggests a changed attitude towards this self-important image of Englishness). Back in 1851, however, this ecstatic spirit of the period was still going strong and it received a further boost from the Great Exhibition, which to many epitomised the glories of the Victorians. On 17 May, 1851, for instance, the *Illustrated London News* proudly proclaimed that:

> For the nonce, and until further orders and new arrangements, London is not

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[29] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, intro. Andrew Sanders (1865; London: Everyman, 1994), p. 133.

simply the capital of a great nation, but the metropolis of the world [...] While it has been rare to find an educated Englishman who did not speak French, or perhaps German or Italian, more or less perfectly, and who did not know by personal inspection the main features of the most celebrated of the Continental cities; it has been still more rare, among the same classes in France or Germany, to find a man who personally knew anything about London or who could speak, or even read, the English language.[30]

The sense of cultural supremacy suggested above, in many ways, defines the typical egotistic self-view of the contemporary Victorians. Prince Albert sums up the extent of this perceived Victorian triumph when he remarks:

> Nobody, however, who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era, will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end, to which, indeed, all history points – the realization of the unity of mankind.[31]

And so, with the whole nation celebrating joyously this period of magnificent glory, it was understandable that the public would identify themselves in relation to their national heritage, rather than their individuality. Up until this period, the Victorians were indeed so proud of being English, that identifying themselves as such became a matter of preoccupation, so much so that the majority never had time to pause and consider the fundamental qualities that made up this particular image, much less to question its justification. But as the British Empire and her

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[30] *Illustrated London News*, 18 (1851), p. 423.
[31] Quoted in J. M. Golby (ed.), *Culture and Society in Britain: 1850-1890 – A Sourcebook of Contemporary Writings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 1.

economical, industrial, and technological strength began to dwindle during the early 1850s,[32] the flaw of this presumptuous cultural identity soon became apparent. The comprehension of the problem of Englishness in the nineteenth century came shortly after the era marched into the 1850s, which, as progress slowed down and the nation was finally able to take time to reflect upon the massive changes (both mentally and physically) that had taken place, it was realised that the contemporary world had changed so completely over the past few decades, that what was previously perceived to be their cultural identity now appeared alien and out of place in their modern surroundings. The religious census of 1851, for instance, made people question the religious aspect of English identity by showing that Victorian society was in fact far from being as religiously devoted as it had always believed itself to be. And similarly, the coming of Darwinism, socialism, the increase of poverty and the crime rate, as well as the agitation for women's rights would all contribute to the questioning of the conventional Victorian identity.

During this period, when a number of prominent thinkers, perceiving their established concept of cultural identity to be under threat, responded by attempting to restructure and redefine traditional Victorian cultural identity in a way that would fit the modern world, an even bigger problem was soon

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[32] The date given here is somewhat speculative and open to argument. But as will be shown in later chapters, evidence during and after this period, such as the rise of the anti-colonial voices, the increasingly desperate attempts to define *culture* in literature, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Governor Eyre controversy of 1866 and their aftermaths, the significance of and reasons for some of the political decisions by Gladstone and Disraeli, etc., can all be regarded as symptoms of an Empire that has already passed its zenith. I, therefore, stand by the date afore given in the belief that, during this time, the regression of the Empire was, to a large number of politicians as well as prominent members of the public, a realised fact; although the majority of the Victorians may not necessarily be conscious of it. For more on the decline of the British Empire after mid-century, see W. D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain 1750-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993); and William P. Kennedy, *Industrial Structure, Capital Markets, and the Origins of British Economic Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

discovered in that what had been traditionally regarded as the Victorian identity, was in fact a vague concept based on a set of institutional forms that no longer function in the modern world. It was soon found out that between different thinkers there existed different versions of conventional cultural identity. In the end, the only consensus seems to be that a definitive form of Victorian cultural identity did not really exist, and that it was up to the new generation to determine the essence of Britishness. To demonstrate this, I turn to cultural theories of two of the most important cultural critics after the 1850s – Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin. On the surface, both of these individuals can be regarded as advocators of conventional middle-class Englishness. However, if we were to examine their ideologies closely, we would realise that their respective concepts of *tradition* were in fact of entirely different make, and that similarities between them are, at best, marginal. This demonstrates clearly the fact that what had previously been universally recognised as Victorian cultural identity is essentially nothing but a hollow concept that existed only in people's mind, each according to his or her own taste. Ruskin, for instance, argues explicitly in works such as *Unto this Last* (1860) that the reason why traditional England is to be forever cherished is due solely to its pre-industrial values, which allows freedom in the creativity of art in a period when individuality could still be practised and be allowed to flourish. When regarded in a historical context, the fact that Ruskin's theory coincides with the popularity of Eastern aesthetic forms in tapestries and potteries is important, because it shows that Ruskin's tradition, rather than being the recognisable representation of cultural identity that it seeks to be, was merely a personal response of his against what he perceived as a major 'threat' to one particular institutional form of Englishness which he was trying to preserve.

For Matthew Arnold, however, although aestheticism is also highly regarded

and praised by him as an integral part of the nobility of traditional culture, its significance is drastically reduced when compared to the sense of structure and order which, as the title of *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) implies, are necessary in order for culture to exist (since without *culture* we would inevitably have *anarchy*). The traditional concept of Victorian identity, in Arnold's mind, was serenaded as a golden age in which the notion of Sweetness and Light (a concept that emphasises the fundamentally Christian and moralistic value which the pre-1850s Victorian identity was generally identified by) flourished. In this sense, Arnold's sense of culture and its reference to traditional Englishness differs significantly from Ruskin's as Arnold's defence was prompted mainly by what he perceived as the loss of faith in the modern age, which does not necessarily lie in the same vein as the Ruskinian model of Victorian identity which emphasises its classical heritage, which constitutes a response to the perceived threat of 'otherness'. It becomes clear, therefore, that the concept of Victorian identity represents more a form of interpretation according to individuals, than an actual and definable fact. Other prominent Victorian figures of the period, such as Carlyle, Mill, Kingsley, and Morris, all had, at one time or another, expressed their own ideas regarding cultural identity; but their versions also differ from each other's significantly and no convincing agreement was ever reached during the nineteenth century.

After the 1850s, the rift between the traditional and contemporary was becoming more and more apparent and a feeling of insecurity towards the definition of identity, as one fears the loss of an established and somewhat comforting definition of one's culture, was beginning to emerge. The sense of urgency felt by Ruskin and Arnold in the need to define cultural identity according to the values of the past (as perceived by them), in a sense, betrays their sense of

insecurity towards the issue and highlights the fact that the belief in this conventional identity, during this period, was in decline. Furthermore, it is exactly this school of thought that prompted many Victorian thinkers to try to re-examine the whole issue of Victorian cultural identity and what it, in reality, signifies. To a large extent, perhaps due to Said's magisterially researched *Orientalism*, modern cultural critics from Benedict Anderson to Tom Nairn have all argued that the dissolution of conventional Britishness took place during the early decades of the twentieth century.[33] However, as I have demonstrated, the reconfiguration of middle-class Britishness actually began during the mid-nineteenth century. This is observable in two extremes. On one hand, there were Ruskin and Arnold who fought to preserve that identity in a traditional sense; but on the other hand, emerging in the literary scene were the likes of Swinburne, Rossetti, and Meredith who sought to establish their identity in a more unorthodox and individual sense (see Chapter 5). By bringing these literary extremities together and examining their conflicting thoughts in relation to Victorian cultural identity, this thesis seeks to establish not only the existence of an identity crisis after the 1850s, but also to understand the problem of the identity question as perceived by the Victorians themselves, including the consideration of some of their proposed solutions. In terms of the impact of the Victorian cultural crisis on the English literary and social movement in general, this thesis will also demonstrate how uncertainties towards Victorian cultural identity from 1850-70 would have had an important role in dictating the trend of the decadent cultural atmosphere, which differs significantly from the Arnoldian 1830s and 40s.

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[33] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); and Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: NLB, 1977).

IV. The Re-Configuration of Traditional Cultural Value

We have observed so far that the problem with Victorian cultural identity is that it is a notion that is largely ambiguous and virtually indefinable. While it is possible to perceive from the public a sense of pride in being English, which overlooks everything else, their notion of this cultural identity, as had been pointed out already, rests largely on a mythologised conception that actually represents nothing.[34] As T. S. Eliot writes:

> [...] the culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class, and that the culture of the group or class is dependent upon the culture of the whole society to which the group or class belongs.[35]

While this is a much-accepted view today – that individuality defines culture as much as culture defines individuality[36] – the problem with the early Victorians is that they do not conform to this view, but regard individuality as a form to be dictated solely by their cultural background. Thomas Carlyle, for instance, was a champion of this ideal in his praise of heroism and the glories of the middle-class. He not only endorsed the concept of an ideal moulded from something that

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[34] This mythologised conception, punctually termed 'imagined communities' by Benedict Anderson, is actually not limited to English civilisation but can be found in all forms of modern nationalist movement. For the purpose of this thesis, however, focus will remain solely on this phenomenon in Britain in the nineteenth century. For more information, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[35] T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948; London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p, 21.

[36] Modern historians and cultural critics such as Benedict Anderson, Linda Colley, E. J. Hobsbawm, and Tom Nairn all, to a certain extent, accept the view that culture is virtually an empty concept and would be meaningless without the individuality to constantly define and re-define it. For further information, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1992); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2nd edn.; and Nairn, *Break-Up*.

pre-conceptualises the individual (in the form of the hero), but also went on to suggest that society should strive to mimic and follow this ideal. However, as the influence of Carlyle declined, along with the rapid degeneration of the glory of the empire, we see in the literature of this period a unanimous feeling of struggle which tries to maintain a conventional identity rendered doubtful by altered social values. This suggests a crisis of cultural identity as perceived by the mid-Victorian generation. From 1860 onwards, as the empire began to suffer its slow economic decline, the feeling of pride and self-assurance of the nation began to falter and a sudden and vast number of works appeared (by prominent Victorian thinkers such as Carlyle, Mills, Kingsley, and Arnold), seeking to give a clear and distinct definition to the concept of culture. The most representative aspect of these works is the unanimous but conscious effort to bring about the reconciliation between their old concept of tradition and the modern world. Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, for instance, emphasises heavily the notion of religion and morality which one can easily trace back to the pre-1850s cultural values; in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859), meanwhile, the sense of identity was being located in the ideal of Victorian Medievalism, one that stresses the chivalric code of manliness as traditionally associated with an aristocratic England. The problem with these views, however, is that the values being revived according to the different institutional forms of Victorian identity (such as religion, duty, or cultural supremacy), were now realised to be also part of the problem because it has become obvious that many of them had also failed to adapt to the changes of time and thus became questionable in terms of their roles in society. Arthur Hugh Clough, in 1862, even went as far as to question the belief of the set of moralistic middle-class values that were presumed to be followed by society. He did so by mocking it:

Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat

When it's so lucrative to cheat:

Bear not false witness; let the lie

Have time on its own wings to fly:

Thou shalt not covet, but tradition

Approves all forms of competition.[37]

The sense of doubt depicted in this poem offers a very good example of the psyche of the Victorian identity crisis. During the 1860s, the sometimes overwhelming sense of doubt towards the traditional definition of Englishness and the questioning of its authenticity as a truthful representation of the culture, had become a widespread anxiety in what Walter E. Houghton describes as a 'tension between the emancipated head and the traditional heart'.[38] Indeed, from the wealth of literature in this period, we can perceive the sense of an existing inner struggle between the 'head' and the 'heart'. On the one hand, the judicious 'head' was looking to embrace rationality and dismiss the false pretence of cultural identity, on the other hand, it was prevented from so by the 'heart' who longed for the return of the comfort and security of an established identity, despite its obvious faults. Among many things, therefore, this thesis is going demonstrate how literature of the mid-nineteenth century reflects an atmosphere of great social division, and challenges the perception that Victorian literature may somehow be considered un-modern, in that public censorship (such as Mudie's library) had instilled into them a certain general trend or direction that stifles personal

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[37] Arthur Hugh Clough, 'The Latest Decalogue', ln. 15-20.

[38] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (London: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 106-7.

expressions. We will see how after the 1850s, Victorian society would split up to seek in different directions the question of their cultural identity. On the one side, we have Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin who champion the preservation of the English middle-class tradition; on the other side, there stand writers like Clough and Meredith who were beginning to have doubts about the very fundamentals of their presupposed identity. The effort of Arnold and Ruskin to reconcile traditional middle-class morality with the present, however, was a development that would weaken with time as the distance between the traditional and contemporary expands. After the 1870s, it is evident that the painful and unsuccessful attempt to redefine culture in the traditional mode would no longer dominate the literary scene; in its place, there is a new brand of literature that seeks constantly to discover (or invent) a new culture – one that not only does not respect the conventional middle-class values, but also thrives on staying as far away from them as possible. As James Baldwin Brown summarises in 1870, the spirit of this particular period of time was one that desires to see:

> [T]he utter overthrow of ancient and venerated authority, the searching, and to a large extent destructive criticism of ideas and intuitions, on which, as on an immovable rock, the order of society was believed to rest; the submission of every thing and every method to the free judgment of reason.[39]

Brown's sermon shows that, from the 1830s to the 1870s, the conventional Victorian middle-class morality has indeed come a long way from being the presupposed cultural identity to which everybody conforms, to that of a ghostly

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[39] James Baldwin Brown, *First Principles of Ecclesiastical Truth: Essays on the Church and Society* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1871), p. 224.

presence which some would like to exorcise. Furthermore, the purpose of this new identity is one that would grow strong towards the 1880s and the 1890s. Unlike the early Victorians' sense of cultural conformity, this newly emerged concept of Englishness is not a coherent one, but one that features polarising diversities, which would lead eventually to another problem -- that of chaos and anarchy. As Holbrook Jackson states:

> The Eighteen Nineties was a decade of a thousand "movements." People said it was a "period of transition," and they were convinced that they were passing not only from one social system to another, but from one morality to another, from one culture to another, and from one religion to a dozen or none! But as a matter of fact there was no concerted action. Everybody, mentally and emotionally, was running about in a hundred different directions.[40]

Indeed, this sense of diversity, or chaos, is something that would ultimately characterise the decadent generation. Although the spirit of the time was one that shows a tendency to move away from the old moralistic concept of culture as dictated by Thomas Arnold; at the same time it also expressed grievance at the loss of that particular identity. It is atmosphere that Max Nordau perceives as the 'Dusk of the Nations.'[41] The Victorian *fin de siècle*, thus, was an age that presents an intriguing dilemma, one that on the one hand embraces this new self-seeking attitude which represents a movement away from a certain imagery that no longer functions, but on the other hand, also acknowledges candidly the state of spiritual decline due to the lack of authorities. It was a phenomenon evidently portrayed in

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[40] Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913; Sussex: Harvester, 1976), p. 31.
[41] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, intro. George L. Mosse (1895; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 2.

the literature of the time that include novels such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and *Dracula* (1897), and poetry by Arthur Symons, A. E. Housman and Ernest Dowson, all of which is characterised by the portrayal of the struggle between two existing worlds, one that is false but with moralistic appeal and the other true to the self but shunned openly by society. While this may seem, to some, to be simply a further manifestation of the feeling of doubts as expressed by the mid-Victorians such as Clough, George Meredith, and J. A. Froude, they are fundamentally different in the sense that although both parties were experiencing doubts, what mid-Victorians like Clough were concerned with was to find a way to reconcile their feelings to their deeply-imbedded concept of culture, in an attempt to define this new emotion in the conventional light of tradition; whereas for the decadents, the answer, they were certain, would come from a different direction. The only problem they faced was that they did not know where to look. The decadent concept of cultural identity, therefore, was a quintessentially different one from the traditional Victorian concept of Englishness. To some, it may even appear to be more of a lack of an identity. R. K. R. Thornton, for instance, believes that:

> The Decadent is a man caught between two opposite and apparently incompatible pulls: on the one hand he is drawn by the world, its necessities, and the attractive impressions he receives from it, while on the other hand he yearns towards the eternal, the ideal, and the unworldly.[42]

This reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity – from being a genuinely

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[42] R. K. R. Thornton, '"Decadence" in Later Nineteenth-Century England', in *Decadence and the 1890s*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp. 15-30 (p. 26). Also see R. K. R. Thornton, *The Decadent Dilemma* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).

believed concept in the 30s to a chaotic illusion as regarded by the *fin de siècle* generation – took place as the mid-Victorians (in particular the generation of the 1850s) realised that they could no longer relate themselves and their changing world to their conventional image of Englishness. As a result, a transformation of identity and cultural value soon followed, when traditional institutional forms of the moralistic middle-class identity – religion, the principle of duty, domestic views, and otherness – suffered simultaneous doubts and were questioned by the public, vicariously forcing the Victorians to reconsider their positions regarding their culture, society, and identity.

As stated in the beginning of this introduction, the aim of this thesis is to explore the reconfiguration of the conventional Victorian cultural identity. The method employed by this study will be to examine the changing public attitude towards the four institutional forms (religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness), which conventional Victorian identity was largely based upon from the 1850s to 70s. While inarguably, questions about these four institutional forms had been lingering in society for a long time (such as religious doubt in the 1830s), the truth is that such early doubts were sporadic, isolated and in most case quickly rejected. The situation during the 1850s, however, is that all four institutional forms were questioned simultaneously, thus creating a much larger impact which in turns caused a ripple effect that brought damage to the next level – that of the question of cultural identity itself. Within this relatively short span of time (1850-70), when all four institutional forms of conventional Victorian cultural identity were experiencing concurrent setbacks, their original impact and importance on the overall conceptualisation of Victorian cultural identity suddenly became an alarming situation. The first four chapters of this thesis, thus, will each be devoted to one specific institutional form within Victorian cultural identity. Their origin,

impact, influence, as well as the setback and doubts suffered by them during the middle of the century, along with its consequence, will be examined in detail. After that, in Chapter 5, we will take a look at the overall result of the dissolution of all four institutional forms in regard to Victorian cultural identity, and examples will be cited and analysed on the perception of this 'loss of cultural identity' by society. The effect of these changes on the overall concept of Victorian Britishness, in which both the nostalgic sentimentality exemplified by Ruskin and Arnold, their desire of escaping the present and seeing the return of their cherished tradition, as well as the emerging phenomenon of the divided self which, to a certain degree, depicts a reluctant acceptance of the truth of a less-than-ideal Victorian identity, will be looked at in detail. At no point, however, do I make the claim that the reconfiguration of conventional Victorian cultural identity is the sole explanation for the Victorian decadence phenomenon;[43] it is my belief, however, that this reconfiguration did have a very important and influential role in the development of the phenomenon. In the end, a summary of my findings as well as a general statement regarding the notion of Victorian cultural identity will be given in the conclusion.

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[43] Influence of the French decadence, for instance, had undoubtedly a huge role in the shaping of her English counterpart; but were it not for the demise of concept of Victorian cultural identity, the adaptation of French elements into the English culture would probably not have been as easy in the first place.

1. RELIGION

By religion, what this chapter seeks to discuss is its terminological implication to the Victorians. Often the word 'religion' is used not in a specific context such as theological discourse or the Church of England, but as a general reference to the broader sense of Christianity including its associate concepts such as morality and the Bible. Of the four institutional forms that we will look at in this thesis, religion is of fundamental importance in shaping such concepts as morality and faith which, as we will see later, form the basis of many western ideologies that other institutional forms rely on. Indeed, throughout the entire eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, religion had always served as the *one* unwavering foundation to the evolution of the middle-class identity. During the Arnoldian pedagogic revolution in the early nineteenth century, therefore, religion was inevitably cast and moulded into one of the founding elements of Victorian cultural identity. However, as the century wore on, with so many social changes alienating one from one's religious belief (including Darwinism), many Victorian individuals showed signs of doubt towards the rationality of Christianity as well as the omniscience and benevolence of God. Even the briefest survey of some of the later Victorian literature reveals a growing trend of such awareness, in that one would either eventually deny his or her rationality and seek religious comfort, or embrace a new system of faith derived from rational and scientific thinking, and abandon God altogether.

In this chapter, our focus will be on establishing a direct relationship between this decline of religion and the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, in order to demonstrate the cultural correlation between the regression of religion as an institutional form and cultural identity as a whole. Indeed, towards the 1850s,

the Victorians' sense of religious faith suffered as a result of myriad social changes that took place. Indeed, as the period progressively became more and more scientifically-minded, the discrepancies between science and religion became more and more difficult to resolve. In the following pages, I will first demonstrate how literature after 1850 showed an unmistakable sense of public anxiety towards the traditional concept of religion. While I am indebted to other studies of this kind which have paved the way for the study of religious doubt in the 1850s,[1] I will not only extend the scope of those works to indicate the wide spread of this problem, but also demonstrate how and why this issue should not be looked at in isolation, but must be linked to the overall question of cultural identity in order to comprehend its full meaning.

I. Religion and the Traditional Perception of Victorian Cultural Identity

In *Sartor Resartus* (1831), one of Thomas Carlyle's more representative works, he writes that 'the loss of his religious Belief was the loss of everything.'[2] For Carlyle this statement was no exaggeration because, as the nineteenth century dawned, Christianity was inarguably perceived by many as the definitive component of Victorian cultural identity. Not only was it capable of offering a sense of cultural differentiation in the sharp division between English Protestantism and French Catholicism,[3] but more commonly, the middle-class's

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[1] For example, see Elisabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: MacMillan, 1986); and Shirley A. Mullen, *Organized Freethought: The Religion of Unbelief in Victorian England* (New York: Garland, 1987).

[2] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, intro. H. D. Traill (1831; London: Chapman and Hall, 1891), p. 129.

[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge once declared that it 'was God's mercy to our age that our Jacobins were infidels, and a scandal to sober Christians. Had they been like our old Puritans, they

perception of moral decency was also in many ways a direct manifestation of the teachings of the church, with its notion of history and tradition based so heavily on the interpretation of the Bible.[4] In other words, to the early Victorians, the conceptualisation of their English middle-class identity is almost inseparable from their knowledge of Christian dogma. As Richard D. Altick explains:

> The ordinary Victorian had been reared in a culture circumscribed by Christian teaching. In addition to a common literary and argumentative vocabulary, the Bible provided the accepted cosmogony, a considerable part of ancient history as it was then known, and above all the foundations of his morality. Religion had determined his whole outlook upon life, his assessment of its nature and purpose; and when what he had been taught to believe were its eternal verities were cast into question, he suffered accordingly.[5]

Bearing this type of attitude in mind, there is no doubt religion would be regarded by the Victorians as one of the most fundamental essences of their interpretation of their culture and identity. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Jane Austen's statement – 'Remember that we are English, that we are Christians'[6] – would continue throughout much of the century to epitomise the Victorians' notion and belief regarding their cultural identity. As G. Kitson Clark observes, during the early Victorian era, 'probably in no other century, except the seventeenth and perhaps the twelfth, did the claims of religion occupy so large a part in the

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would have trodden Church and King to dust, at least for a time.' See S. T. Coleridge, *The Table Talk and Ominana* (1836; London: Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 187.

[4] For more information on the connection between the early Victorians and their sense of religion, see E. E. Kellett, *Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age* (London: Epworth, 1938), and Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part I* (London: A. & C. Black, 1966).

[5] Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People* (London: Norton, 1973), pp. 203-204.

[6] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Marilyn Butler (1818; London: Penguin, 1995), p. 172.

nation's life, or did men speaking in the name of religion contrive to exercise so much power.'[7] The fact that Victorian cultural identity is heavily based on their notion of faith is well documented.

But while early Victorian bestsellers like Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy, a Book of Thoughts and Arguments, Originally Treated* (1838) and Philip James Bailey's poem 'Festus' (1839),[8] which were religious and moral sermons in disguise, can serve as testimony to the widespread preoccupation with religious devotion during this period, a sense of disturbance also looms in the air at the same time, and would continue to gain influence. As Lance St John Butler points out, one of the most unique characteristics of this early nineteenth century period, in regard to English middle-class values and religion, is the sense that while profession in faith was undeniably strong, at the same time, an air of 'unbelief' also existed which 'seemed to gain ground in spite of the greatly increased evangelistic effort.'[9] This view is shared by J. Hillis Miller, who states that while the notion of religious doubt had existed in England prior to the Victorian era, the difference between the Victorians and the dissenters of the previous ages (such as the Romantics),[10] is that the 'Romantics still believe in God, and they find his absence intolerable', whereas for the Victorians, although the absence of God must have been equally intolerable, they are not so sure if they can believe in God anymore. This Victorian doubt was therefore more troubling because unlike its predecessor, the Victorian crisis of faith is not limited to the anxiety over the physical presence of God in the world, but is to do with their

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[7] Clark, p. 20.

[8] Information obtained from Margaret Dalziel, *Popular Fiction a Hundred Years Ago: An Unexplored Tract of Literary History* (London: Cohen & West, 1957).

[9] Lance St John Butler, *Victorian Doubt: Literary and Cultural Discourses* (London: Harvester, 1990), p. 5.

[10] See J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 13.

doubt over the possibility of his very existence. In Shelley, for example, although his spirit of 'atheism' was well known even in his own time, his religious criticism, instead of being atheistic in nature, was instead founded very much on a deep sense of faith where notions such as 'heaven' and 'salvation' played a fundamental role, and his objection was mainly targeted at religious institutions and not necessarily its beliefs. Even in the case of a Victorian like John Henry Newman, despite being one of the most representative figures of the nineteenth century in regard to religiousness and devotion, he finds it necessary to take time to reflect upon the question of the existence of God, before any legitimate religious claim could be made. In *An Essay on the Development of Christine Doctrine* (1845), for instance, Newman writes:

> We are told that God has spoken. Where? In a book? We have tried it and it *disappoints*; it disappoints, that most holy and blessed gift, not from fault of its own, but because it is used for a purpose for which it was not given.[11]

Here we have one of the rare occasions in which Newman, who to many personifies the definition of absolute devotion and faith, uncharacteristically lets his guard down to reveal a glimmer of doubt that not only characterises his age but also shows an aspect of him that was seldom acknowledged. Indeed, in recent academic work that details Newman's life and works, a quotation of such magnitude in which the feeling of doubt could be detected in even Newman, hard to believe as it is, is often missed or dismissed by biographers and scholars. Although it is true that following this quotation, Newman would immediately go

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[11] John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christine Doctrine* (1845; London: Pelican, 1974), p. 175.

on to dismiss its claim and argue against the point raised by this mentality, it nonetheless shows a crack in his religious armour in the sense that he was prepared to discuss, hence acknowledge, the existence of such doubts in the first place (which he curiously failed to mention in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864)). Issues relating to religious anxiety are not just conjectures of modern scholars, but are something recognised and even addressed by the Victorians in their own time (which even Newman had found difficult to ignore). Although it may be true that someone like Newman was able to deal with his doubt by clinging to his belief in the necessity of religion,[12] to his contemporaries whose need of faith was less profound, religious doubt was not just something that could be easily overpowered and downplayed. This question of a possible 'truth' behind religion, and the questioning of the logic behind conventional blind faith, thus, became a recognisable fact and contemporary literature suggests that it was gradually acknowledged and accepted by society as a pressing concern during the late 1840s.[13] Consider, for example, George Eliot's translation of *Das Leben Jesu* in 1846, which directly questions the Bible's authority by presenting the story of Jesus in an unconventional light. The fact that such publications were able to attract a ready audience at the time, demonstrates the fact that the awareness of the

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[12] See William R. Fey, *Faith and Doubt: the Unfolding of Newman's Thought on Certainty* (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos, 1976); Michael Ffinch, *Cardinal Newman: The Second Spring* (London: Weidenfeld Nicolson, 1991); and S. A. Grave, *Conscience in Newman's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

[13] The historical background of the Victorian religious crisis actually dates back to the previous century but did not leave a serious imprint of doubt until the 1850s. Modern historians generally attribute its cause to a combination of two factors. The first being a late response to the events that took place during the 1830s, such as the Oxford Movement, the publication of Charles Lyell's *The Principles of Geology*, as well as the founding of University College, London (the first university in England to admit students regardless of their religious background, known then as 'the Godless institution in Gower Street'), all of which having eventually a detrimental effect on people's faith on religion's infallibility. The second factor is the rapid progress (scientific as well as economic) made by society up to the 1850s which further alienated people from their traditional belief. For more information on the Victorian crisis of faith, see Jay, *Faith and Doubt*; Mullen, *Organized Freethought*; L. E. Elliot-Binns, *Religion in the Victorian Era* (London: Lutterworth, 1946); and Gerald Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 4 vols.

declining influence of God on English society was by then already apparent. The religious census of 1851 gave further proof of this by revealing the fact that a large population of England, particularly those from the lower-classes, were in fact non-churchgoers.[14] During this period, therefore, it seems clear that the religious anxiety of society had finally matured to the point that a large population were beginning to feel compelled to explore and examine their notion of traditional belief. As Harriet Martineau states shrewdly in 1853:

> I believe that no one questions that a very large proportion of our people are now so adrift [...] no one has presented to them, and they cannot obtain for themselves, any ground of conviction as firm and clear as that which sufficed for our fathers in their days.[15]

The blunt statement by Martineau, in many ways, represents a realisation in Victorian society of the problem with its conventional religious identity. The fact that a huge population is now proven to be 'adrift' means not only trouble to the conscience of the remaining 'God-fearing' citizens of England, but would also imply a question to their perception of conventional middle-class values as the accepted form of Victorian cultural identity, of which religion had always been viewed as an inseparable element. I will now demonstrate this by examining how different writings of the time depict an unanimous feeling of insecurity in respect

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[14] Of the approximately 13.5 million people who were expected to be regular churchgoers at the time, only slightly more than half (7.25 million) lived up to this expectation. However, the actual number of churchgoers may be even lower because the census does not make the distinction between people who attend church twice in one day. It is further revealed that those who are absent from church are predominantly of the working class. For more information, see John D. Gay, *The Geography of Religion in England* (London : Duckworth, 1971).

[15] Harriet Martineau, 'Preface' to Comte, Augustus, *The Positive Philosophy* (London: John Chapman, 1853), pp. vii-viii.

to cultural identity, which was triggered by religious anxiety.

II. Tennyson, Froude, and Religious Anxiety

As mentioned earlier, Christianity to the Victorians represents much more than just a question of faith. It is an integral institutional form to the formation of Victorian cultural identity, hence the religious anxiety during the 1850s is not only an issue that affects society's belief in God or the Church, but also the very heart of the struggle between the Victorians and their understanding of their cultural identity. In the first section of this chapter, I examined evidence from the period that clearly reveals a sense of public anxiety towards religion. We will now proceed in this section to demonstrate how this religious anxiety was felt and registered by the Victorians to be more than just a question of faith, which affects the very integrity of their cultural identity.

I begin my survey by looking at Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), which is perhaps unrivalled by any other works in its powerful signal of the mid-Victorian religious crisis. While there are already a vast amount of studies of *In Memoriam* and its religious implication,[16] its insinuation regarding a correlation between faith and identity has been given less literary attention. However, as I am about to show, a prominent feature of the poem that should not be overlooked is its depiction of the loss of cultural identity as a direct result of the loss of faith. Throughout the poem, the poet is persistent in the depiction of an inner pain,

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[16] See, for instance, A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam* (London: MacMillan, 1907); John Dixon Hunt, *Tennyson, In Memoriam: A Casebook* (London: MacMillan, 1970); Timothy Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (London: Yale University Press, 1977).

which is caused by the struggle between the longing for a return to the simplicity of blind faith, and his inability to do so due to his rationality (which is consistent with the religious struggle of the age). For instance, the poem's opening verse states:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

Thine are these orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death and lo, Thy foot
Is on the skull which thou has made.[17]

The poet begins by pointing out the problem of religious uncertainty as the poet questions openly the rationale behind the notion of putting faith in something which 'we cannot prove', which suggests the mind to be no longer content with pouring forth its devotion to something without even the simple evidence of 'thy face'. The conflict, therefore, is that in order for the poet to regain his belief, he needs to prove the truth of his religion, but is unable to do so. Faith becomes something that is intangible for him. In the second stanza, the rationale of the poet is now moving further to question not only the existence of God, but also the very sanity of bringing justification to such a God who is both the bringer of 'Life' and

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[17] Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Prologue. 1-8. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

'Death'. This accusation, furthermore, hints at a possibly cynical God, whose foot is perceived to be resting on the 'skull' of its own creation – mankind. The poet, however, is agonised not because he has detected the existence of an 'evil' side to God, but because he is caught in a dilemma: despite what his mind tells him, he still longs to give his devotion once more to God and is pained by his inability to justify his doing so. As the third stanza reads:

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:

Thou madest man, he knows not why,

He thinks he was not made to die;

And Thou has made him: Thou art just. (Prologue. 9-12)

Here, having already established his religious doubt, the poet proceeds to illustrate his misery in having such doubts as he begins to speak of his desperation. At this point, however, the question becomes one of why the poet persists in his pursuit of faith, despite his obvious realisation of its many faults. In spite of the poet's rationalisation, deep down inside he still feels an urge to return once again to that blind devotion to faith which he feels he has lost. Although the dilemma of God being both the maker and destroyer of mankind is still present, the tone of this third stanza suggests that rather than making further allegations, the poet is now trying hard to justify, and make an excuse for these contradicting and unreasonable aspects of his faith. The final sentence – 'Thou has made him: Thou art just' – summarises this feeling in its reference to God, whose role is now alluded to by the poet as the 'maker' only, thus signifying his willing ignorance of the other aspect of God being the destroyer (which was the source of his torment in the first place). This deliberate turning of a blind eye to the argument allows the

poet to proclaim once more 'Thou art just' and return to his embrace. Contemporary readers who were experiencing a similar religious crisis at the time probably found it easy to sympathise with the poet for his religious longing. However, unlike Tennyson, they probably did not understand the reason for the persistency of this feeling. The reason for the ongoing desire for faith in *In Memoriam* is betrayed by the poet's earlier mention of his fear of being left 'in the dust', which implies that it is not out of his love for God that he wishes to be faithful to him once more; rather, it is out of fear of being left stranded in a place of dust (which implies fear, death, solitude, and a loss of direction) that he seeks to re-embrace religion. This is substantiated by the fact that the feeling of anxiety consistently echoes throughout the entire poem:

Now, sometimes in my sorrow shut,

Or breaking into song by fits,

Alone, alone, to where he sits,

The shadow cloak'd from head to foot,

Who keeps the keys of all the creeds,

I wander, often falling lame,

And looking back to whence I came,

Or on to where the pathway leads; (XXIII. 1-8)

In these two stanzas, the connection between the poet's fear of being lost and his need for religion is made clear, in the sense that, without his religion, he describes himself as once more being lost in the 'dust', with God forever invisible to him (being 'shadow cloak'd from head to food'). But this anxiety over personal faith,

is also one that reflects an identity crisis, due to faith being such a crucial component of middle-class ideology. His allusion to being lost reveals this because, besides having biblical significance – by recalling the biblical image of a flock of sheep without its shepherd – it is also coupled with a sense of insecurity over his cultural identity, in which his description of this feeling as 'not knowing where he "came" from', signals a severance from the value from which man draws his identity. Furthermore, turning away from religion is perceived by the poet to mean an exodus from society (from which point he will no longer know 'where the pathway leads'). In other words, conventional faith is interpreted as absolutely inseparable from one's social identity.

Because of the close association between conventional English middle-class values and religious belief, the loss of identity referred to by the poet here clearly indicates a connection between the three inseparable entities of religion, middle-class values, and the perceived Victorian cultural identity as a whole. The impact of this contemporary religious dilemma, therefore, is now multiplied because his sense of being, in how he is taught by his conventional society to view himself (the past), and how society would henceforth view him (the future), is now in danger as a result of his loss of faith. Therefore, in the poem, a battle is constantly being fought between his need for faith and his rationality which forces him away from his faith. Midway through the poem, this battle inside the poet's mind is most salient when he states that:

O, yet we trust that somehow good

Will be the final goal of ill,

To pangs of nature, sins of will,

Defects of doubt, and taints of blood; (LIV. 1-4)

And,

But trust that those we call the dead

Are breathers of an ampler day

For ever nobler ends. They say,

The solid earth whereon we tread... (CXVIII. 5-8)

From these stanzas, one realises that the poet has by now completely abandoned his sense of reason to allow himself to ponder the possibility of 'good' being somehow the 'final goal of ill', and the 'dead' being the 'breathers of an ampler day', which in turn has allowed the poet to reach a sense of reconciliation and convince himself of the believability of his religion, despite his earlier rationality. It is, however, noticeable that in these verses, Tennyson deliberately juxtaposes contradictory terms such as 'good' and 'ill', 'dead' and 'breathers', to show the importance of faith as a representation of his identity, which is triumphing over his sense of rationality, as he now desires nothing more than the reconciliation of his faith and his being. The conclusion of the poem, therefore, is a surprisingly affirmative one which sees the poet abandoning his earlier dilemma to throw himself once more into the arms of blind faith. As the final stanza reads:

That God, which ever lives and loves,

One God, one law, one element,

And one far-off divine event,

To which the whole creation moves. (Epilogue. 141-44)

By ending the poem in such a resolute tone, the poet reveals that he is content to leave the unanswerable unanswered, as the important thing to him now is to be able to once again unite himself with his notion of faith, hence allowing him to readopt his tradition and identity. We should bear in mind, however, that nothing has in fact been resolved and that, rather than providing a satisfying solution to the troubling question of faith, this conclusion reflects simply the poet's wilful ignorance of doubts concerning his faith. *In Memoriam*, therefore, should not be read as Tennyson's solution to his religious crisis, but rather as a vivid portrayal of the sense of pain the mid-Victorians must have felt when they began to question Christianity, and the difficulties (or impossibilities) of bowing to their rational instincts and abandoning faith because of the intricate connection between religion and Victorian cultural identity.[18]

By taking into account the intricate relationship between the Victorians' notion of the self and their religious view, *In Memoriam* reveals itself to be as much a poem that explores faith as it is about the issue of nineteenth century English identity. Manifested throughout the poem is the realisation of religion having a dialectical relationship with the pre-existing concept of Victorian cultural identity, in that the message seems to be that, without religion, one would no longer be able to fit oneself into his preconceived middle-class identity. This mentality, which is depicted so brilliantly in *In Memoriam*, is in fact a widespread phenomenon that can be easily found in literature of different genres during the

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[18] Due to the constraint of time and space, I have only been able to discuss the religious doubt of Tennyson as reflected in *In Memoriam*. However, the theme of struggle between one's rationality and faith and the eventual abandonment of logic to religion is present also in many of his other poems. In 'Maud', for instance, there are depictions of scenes in which despite the realisation of the hero that 'the drift of the Maker is dark' (I, 8, 143), his eventual decision was nonetheless to choose to 'embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd.' (III, 5, 59) For more on Tennyson's doubt, see Lionel Stevenson, *Darwin Among the Poets* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1932); and George Roppen, '"The Crowning Race." Evolution and Poetic Belief: A Study in Some Victorian and Modern Writers', *Norwegian Studies in English*, 5 (1965), 83-112.

era. J. A. Froude, who had a similar experience as Clough in having been educated by Thomas Arnold only to find a discrepancy between the principles of Rugby and the real world, wrote of his experience in the autobiographical novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849). In the novel, he compares his religious doubt to:

> [T]he parting of the ways; I look down one, and I see a bright flowery road, with *friends* and *fortune* smiling, and a *happy home*, and the *work* I long for, all which promise to make life delightful: down the other and I see – oh, I will not look down the other; if I shall never dare to choose it.[19]

The sentimentality expressed in this passage bears a striking similarity to the lamentation of Tennyson in *In Memoriam*, in the sense that both equate the loss of religious faith to the loss of social comfort and companionship. The novel itself tells the story of Markham Sutherland who, upon giving up his living as a clergyman because of his religious scepticism, goes to Italy where he falls in love with a married woman named Helen Leonard, which subsequently leads to tragedy for both of them. As with the poet of *In Memoriam*, the quotation above betrays Froude's religious doubt to be not so much religious at root, but rather an anxiety that is more concerned with elements such as friends, fortune, happy home, and work. These are all important social factors that enable one to establish interpersonal relationships, as well as to obtain a sense of identity (in a similar context to Tennyson's notion of root and tradition). Furthermore, the fear of the narrator here is also that the abandonment of his faith would lead to the severance of his ties with his family and society. Faith, in other words, is presented here, as

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[19] J. A. Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith*, intro. Rosemary Ashton (1849; London: Libris, 1988), p. 37. My Italics. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

in Tennyson's poem, to be not just a religious issue, but one that concerns the meaning of cultural identity.

In the introduction, I discussed the dialectical relationship that exists between Victorian cultural identity and its institutional forms, which mutually define yet at the same time constrain the definition of each other. What we have observed so far in this chapter is the realisation of this dialectic discourse, as reflected in the works of Tennyson and Froude. The expression, or fear, of this dialectical relationship between faith and Victorian cultural identity is also strikingly similar between the two authors, as they share an identical concern for the loss of one's identity due to the questioning of faith. This suggests that the intricate influence which religion and cultural identity exert on one another seems to be an awareness that permeates widely among the Victorians at the time. But while, in *In Memoriam*, the poet is content in the end to leave the unanswerable unanswered, in *The Nemesis of Faith*, Froude adopts a much more disparaging approach to this idea, and criticises society for being too easily suppressed and confined by its conventional upbringing. This is particularly clear in the adulterous relationship between Markham and Helen, which evolves around the theme of disillusionment with the belief that religion defines identity. The meeting of Markham and Helen takes place as Markham goes on a self-imposed exile to Italy after he has renounced his own faith. The irony in this, however, is that while Helen's husband firmly believes 'with all his heart in the absolute virtue of everything English' (168), the fact that Markham is there because of his religious exile from England signals his Englishness to be somewhat doubtful, especially when interpreted in the terms dictated by Victorian middle-class values. The adulterous relationship which takes place soon after only confirms the complete disintegration of his 'absolute virtue'. This insinuates the notion that without religion, the morality and

virtue of the individual (as Markham himself is aware: 'to attempt to separate morality from religion is madness' (180)) would as a result suffer, leading to the collapse of his cultural identity (Englishness). It further implies the impossibility of the existence of a 'respectable' identity without religion. Markham's cultural identity, therefore, is nullified. Thus the narrator duly remarks: 'This final fall of his was but the result of the slow collapsing of his [religious] system' (183).

Although the context of the novel was set up in this seemingly conventional light, what Froude was in fact determined to do was to challenge the presupposed connection between moralistic Victorian identity and religion, which suggests that a man without religion is a man without morals. If we say that, in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson offers the orthodox solution to his doubt via his reconciliation with Christianity, then Froude seemingly provides the exact opposite in *Nemesis*. His most direct attack against the dialectical relationship between religion and cultural identity is to be found in the innocence of Helen. For instance, the narrator laments the fact that:

> She had no idea what she was doing. Ill instructed as she had been religiously, her instinct had recoiled from the worldly instruction which she might have learnt as a substitute; and she had no notion of right and wrong beyond what her heart said to her. (188)

The question posed to the readers by Helen's attitude is one that asks whether to love as Markham and Helen (who is naively lured into an unloving marriage at a young age) do is wrong. And if not, then the insinuation becomes that the 'worldly instruction' which her traditional middle-class upbringing with its rigid religious teachings has taught her is questionable. By setting up his argument in such a way,

Froude, like the poet in *In Memoriam*, is able to demonstrate his realisation of the hollow relevance of his faith in relation to Victorian cultural identity, which illustrates the fundamental problem of the mid-Victorian religious crisis.

Besides attempting to justify the adulterous relationship between the hero and heroine over their conventional religious background, in the final chapters of the story, an even more critical observation towards the Victorian middle-class religious tradition was made by Froude in the contrasting reactions from Markham and Helen after the death of the baby. Firstly, Markham's decision to capitulate and re-embrace faith, despite his lingering doubt was condemned by the narrator:

> Markham's new faith fabric had been reared upon the clouds of sudden violent feeling, and no air castle was ever of more unabiding growth; doubt soon sapped it, [...] and, amidst the wasted ruins of his life, where the bare bleak soil was strewed with wrecked purposes and shattered creeds, with no hope to stay him, with no fear to raise the most dreary phantom beyond the grave, he sunk down into the barren waste. (226-27)

Contrast this with Helen's frame of mind:

> For Helen lived and died unreconciled with the Church. [...] Helen might have joined it, [...] only if she could have made one first indispensable confession that she had *sinned* in her love for Markham Sutherland – yet, with singular persistency, she declared to the last that her sin had been in her marriage, not in her love. Unlike his, her early training had been too vague to weigh at all against the *feeling* which her love had given her; she had little knowledge and an unpractised

> intellect – she had only her heart, which had refused to condemn her – she had never examined herself. (225)

The message from Froude is clear: it is better to discard a deceptive shell and believe in one's own sense of right and wrong, than to blindly embrace something that is irreconcilable to our conscience and foolishly bind ourselves to a falsely prescribed code of middle-class principles that are in fact meaningless.

Contemporary reviews of *Nemesis* show that, while the public did relate to this feeling of doubt as portrayed by the novel, most were reluctant to abandon the faith that a solution would eventually be found, and condemned Froude for his rejection of Christianity. For example, despite one reviewer's belief that 'it appears to us impossible that a man whose soul had for the time being attained to any degree of hopefulness and peace could have put forward a book so hopeless',[20] he nonetheless perceives a grain of truth in the text:

> Considered in [another] light, the book becomes, in its soul-baring truthfulness, a quite invaluable record of the fiery struggles and temptations through which the youth of this nineteenth century has to force its way in religious matters – bloodlessly as yet; of the way in which many truths of the past are fast becoming lies to it, for want of comprehension and life in the utterers [...][21]

Meanwhile, in another article from the *Edinburgh Review*, the writer states upfront that his intention is not to criticise the author of *Nemesis*, but to express his condolence for him in his state of 'helplessness to which man is soon reduced

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[20] 'Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 39 (1849), 545-560 (p. 552).
[21] Ibid., p. 554.

if he relies upon his reason alone'.[22] This is interesting because it shows how much the spirit of the age has changed from its Arnoldian religious devotion, in the sense that despite maintaining a firm conviction in God (which the writer of this article certainly does), one finds it increasingly impossible to simply dismiss the dissenters' view as 'blasphemy'. The best this writer is able to do is to dismiss doubt by establishing (fabricating) a sort of hierarchy between these elements in which 'Reason is the firstborn, but faith inherits the blessing' (289). By having logic placed beneath faith in such a sequence, the aim of this writer is clearly to nullify the possibility of conflict between reason and faith, of which *Nemesis* is often regarded as a proponent. However, on the other hand, this also shows how widespread this sense of doubt (based on reasoning) was at the time, that conventionalists not only recognised it, but felt they had to address and warn society of the 'thousands of youths who are falling into the same errors and perils from sheer vanity and affectation' (336), in the hope of deterring the public from increasingly bewildering 'themselves by *really* deep meditation on inexplicable mysteries' (336).

As we have observed in this section, *In Memoriam* and *The Nemesis of Faith* are not simply literary reflections of the mid-nineteenth century religious dilemma which conventional readings seem to suggest, but they importantly exemplify the Victorian awareness of a pre-existing dialectical relationship between religion as an institutional form and cultural identity. Whether it is Markham's repeated recognition of 'everything may be lost unless one holds a particular belief' (84), the feeling of 'I cannot say what the Bible was not to me' (118), or the poet's fear

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[22] 'Reason and Faith: their Claims and Conflicts', *Edinburgh Review*, 90 (1849), 293-356 (p. 298). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

of 'the folded gloom';[23] it is, in all cases, clear that there exists a love/hate relationship between the protagonist and his religion, in which the culprit points directly to the conventional perception that one's faith is synonymous with one's cultural identity. To the Victorians, the problem is that when their crisis of faith occurred, their sense of identity became confused vicariously. Consequently, in both the novel and the poem, when the heroes finally make up their minds to break away from conventions, they have difficulties doing so because of their traditional upbringing. Tennyson and Froude, in this sense, both represent views that indicate the 'dissentient' attitude of the 1850s towards the question of legitimacy of the religious aspect of Victorian identity. Although they both experienced doubt towards religion, they were nonetheless clearly aware (on a subconscious level) of the interconnectedness between the two concepts, and recognised that the abandoning of religion means the dissolution of the Victorians' identity. In the 1850s, John Stuart Mill would take Tennyson and Froude's dissentient attitude one step further by understanding and then expounding the fact that, without religion, the Victorians could still have an identity of their own.

Having been educated and influenced by the most illustrious religious dissenters of the time (James Mill and Jeremy Bentham), John Stuart Mill could not have had a more unorthodox childhood in terms of faith and religion. But while James Mill and Bentham found their theories suffocated by a public that still held Christianity in high regard, John Stuart Mill was able to build on the general religious doubt of his days and provide a philosophical underpinning to his question of religion. Thus, unlike Tennyson and Froude's views which are largely based on emotions, Mill's unique background enabled him to provide an analysis that is objective and insightful regarding the dialectical nature of religion

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[23] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, CXXII, 3.

and cultural identity. Furthermore, having taken the religious anxiety of his days into account, Mill's argument deviates from that of his father and Bentham, in that he does not oppose the theoretical existence of God, but simply believes that its lack of scientific proof makes the possibility unlikely. Mill's theory, in other words, is a true product of its time because it was able to take into account the concerns of his age, and respond to them accordingly. He acknowledges, for example, that it is 'perfectly conceivable that religion may be morally useful without being intellectually sustainable',[24] but goes on to criticise the perceived relationship that exists between religion and Victorian cultural identity:

> Many, again, having observed in others or experienced in themselves elevated feelings which they imagine incapable of emanating from any other source than religion, have an honest aversion to anything tending, as they think, to dry up the fountain of such feelings.[25]

What Mill's philosophy implies is that it is redundant to regard religion as a prerequisite to the belief in morality within oneself, and that the falsity of the Bible does not necessarily have to negate the existence of a moralistic individuality. Contrary to his contemporaries, Mill has always regarded religion and Victorian cultural identity to be two issues that stand completely independent of each other, and his suggestion is that it would be good for society to do the same.[26] The difficulty of this mental separation, however, is great, and the

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[24] John Stuart Mill, 'The Utility of Religion', in *Three Essays on Religion* (1874; New York: Prometheus, 1998), pp. 69-122 (p. 73).

[25] Ibid., p. 72.

[26] According to Mill's logic, morality and virtue (which are still legitimately viewed as qualities belonging to the Victorian identity) do not necessarily have to be achieved through religious dogmas, but can (and indeed should) be reached via logic and utilitarianism. See John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a Connected View of the*

writings of Tennyson and Froude certainly attest to this fact. Meanwhile, with the approach of the 1860s, the already floundering social faith was dealt an even more decimating blow by the arrival of Darwinism. The effect of this on Victorian cultural identity is the further weakening of conventional English middle-class perceptions of religion on which the notion of Englishness hinges. This reaction is best reflected in the controversies that were sparked by Mill's posthumously published *Three Essays on Religion* (written during the 1850s but not published until 1874), which, despite the attacks it received from the conservative side of society that was still reluctant to let go of their traditional faith, eventually received strong support from contemporary reviewers who shared Mill's view, which was not completely unanticipated. John William Mears, for instance, regards the essays as 'one of the most remarkable and significant of all of the author's productions';[27] and Alexander Bain, similarly, declared Mill's 'aspirations and hopes for a bright future to the race' a 'religion of humanity', and praises his ideal as one 'that involves no contradictions to our knowledge'.[28] However, by a large margin, the most radical and atheistic criticism of the essays came from a reviewer who called himself 'Antichrist', who faults Mill for giving praises to the moral principles of Christianity, in that:

> Mill says of one God, it is a moral obliquity and an intellectual contradiction, and instead would make Christ an ideal pattern. For ourselves, we cannot see a greater moral obliquity and intellectual contradiction than in Christ, and it brought more

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Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation (London: John W. Parker, 1846) and *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*.

[27] John Williams Mears, 'Theistic Reactions in Modern Speculation', *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, 4 (1875), 339-347 (p. 347).

[28] Alexander Bain, *John Stuart Mill: A Criticism, with Personal Recollections* (London: Longman & Co., 1882), p. 140.

harm to us.[29]

While there should be no question that the approach taken by 'Antichrist' is by no means representative of Victorian society (in fact, he should be treated as an extremist in every sense of the word), yet the fact that such a book was actually published and that the writer was even able to conceive of such an idea in the first place, shows that the general mentality regarding religion had indeed shifted a great deal from the 1830s, when everything was seemingly governed by a rigid middle-class doctrine with no exception. It is also evident that the gap between the conventional approach to Englishness according to the stringent code of middle-class morality, and the emerging carefree spirit of the decadence, has become greater than ever after 1850.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, there can be no denying that uncertainties were beginning to show signs of having an unsettling effect on the previously unquestionable Christian dogma,[30] and that the realisation of the burden of the link between faith and their cultural identity, by now, was beginning to take its toll on the public. But while these voices of 'dissent' would grow strong from this point onward, on the other hand, writings that denounce heavily these kinds of doubt were also emerging in great number to counter Christianity's expanding number of critics. Robert Browning's poetry is a classic example of this. I shall thus proceed to examine this sense of 'religious optimism' in the works of Browning to see how it fits in with the concept of Victorian cultural identity.

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[29] Antichrist, *The Jesus Christ of J. S. Mill* (London: Edward Truelove, 1875), p. 3.

[30] Dickens, for instance, would satirise this in the character of Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, who 'knows no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament, than if he had been bred among idolaters.' (Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, intro. Lionel Trilling (1857; London: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 30).

III. The Religious Optimism of Robert Browning

We have just witnessed how the writings of Tennyson, Froude, and Mill reflect a growing awareness, on behalf of the Victorians, of the existing link between religion and cultural identity which many felt powerless to break. However, despite the fact that the works by these authors offer an honest representation of the feeling of the time, we must consider them unorthodox because the feeling of religious necessity was still very strong at the time so that any open acknowledgement and confession of religious doubt was inevitably rare. Therefore, in order to fully grasp the complete impact of the mid-Victorian religious crisis and its implication on the social conscience at large, an orthodox point of view would be useful in allowing us to determine the actual level of infiltration of religious doubt into the public awareness of cultural identity. For this purpose I have chosen to study some of Robert Browning's religious poems in order to decipher the extent of realisation of the dialectical relationship between religion and cultural identity.

If the writings we have examined so far represent a sense of religious anxiety on the rise, then, on the opposite side, cultural conventionalists maintained an equally strong force of religion endorsement which was vociferous in their condemnation of even the slightest religious doubt (*The Nemesis of Faith*, for example, was burned in front of a crowd at Oxford by William Sewell in order to make a public statement). Robert Browning is a good example of someone who is considered by many critics, fairly or unfairly, to be the ultimate religious optimist in contrast to Tennyson the doubter. Llewellyn Woodward, for example, believes that:

A great deal of Tennyson's work may be described as the poetry of escape; it would be difficult to apply this term to the poems of Robert Browning. Browning, like Tennyson, was concerned with the problems of conduct and with the reaffirmation of belief, but he was not satisfied merely to state the case in exquisite language, and to hope for the best in spite of the evidence.[31]

Indeed, in contrast to the Tennyson's religious uncertainty, one of the most striking features about Browning's poems is that of a permeating knowledge, or assurance, of the existence of God, which is often portrayed in a masculine and assertive language unique to his poetry and grants little room for argument. H. B. Charlton, for instance, was firmly convinced that Browning 'believed in God, first realised as a God of Power, and then revealed as a God of Love', and that in his poetry, 'He is not arguing; he is seeking to prove nothing'.[32] From an early stage in his career, indeed, Browning's religious devotion is something that is blatantly detectable. In 'Pauline' (1833), for instance:

> Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth
>
> And love; and as one just escaped from death
>
> Would bind himself in bands of friends to feel
>
> He lives indeed, so, I would lean on thee!
>
> Thou must be ever with me, most in gloom
>
> If such must come, but chiefly when I die,

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[31] Llewellyn Woodword, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), 2nd edn., p. 536.

[32] H. B. Charlton, *Browning as Poet of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), p. 3 & 10. Other studies that share this similar view are: Roy E. Gridley, *Browning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Thomas Blackburn, *Robert Browning: A Study of His Poetry* (London: Eyre & Spootiswoode, 1967); and Norton B. Crowell, *The Convex Glass: The Mind of Robert Browning* (New Mexico: The University of New Mexico Press, 1968).

For I seem, dying, as one going in the dark

To fight a giant: but live thou for ever,

And be to all what thou hast been to me![33]

While it is obvious that the religious journey in 'Pauline' is about discovery and affirmation, unlike the journey of *In Memoriam*, the existence of God was never portrayed as a concern of the poet, who in sharp contrast to Tennyson embarks on his voyage with a seemingly innate affirmation of God's existence in mind. If the theme of *In Memoriam* is about seeking a way to dispel the poet's religious doubt, then the purpose of 'Pauline' would seem to be the exact opposite – as he appears to simply want to confirm his existing belief in an unquestionable God. This sense of adamant devotion to faith, furthermore, is consistently kept up by Browning throughout his career. In 'Bishop Blougram's Apology' (1855), for instance, he writes:

You call for faith:

I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.

The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,

If faith o'vercomes doubt. How I know it does?

By life and man's free will, God gave for that![34]

Although written some twenty years later than 'Pauline', time seems to have done very little to alter Browning's belief in the existence of God and his faith in Christianity, as he was as adamant about his religious conviction in the 1850s as

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[33] Robert Browning, 'Pauline', 1020-1028.
[34] Browning, 'Bishop Blougram's Apology', 601-605.

he was in the 1830s. As a religious poet, therefore, Browning differs drastically from Tennyson in the sense that even during the tumultuous era of the 1850s, when the atmosphere of doubt as exemplified by Tennyson, Froude, and Mill was mounting against the conventional faith of the middle-class, Browning's belief remained as resolute as ever. From Bishop Blougram's monologue, it is clear that Browning perceives the common secular grounds of doubt during the 1850s to be a confirmation of faith, rather than its opposite, so that 'the more of doubt, the stronger faith'. This is, furthermore, a predominant theme in all of the poems that appeared in *Men and Women* (1855), almost as if Browning had deliberately wanted to put together this selection of poems, in this particular period of time, to counter the growing trend of doubt that was looming like a dark cloud. In 'Fra Lippo Lippi', for example, despite the poem's early criticism of the repression of the church, the beauty that is celebrated as the creation of God is nonetheless confirmed and serenaded. Similarly, in 'Holy-Cross Day', regardless of the comedic elements of the poem, the spirit of religion is praised by the poet as a superior notion that is desirable to all. This sense of religious conviction of Browning is so obvious that it is sometimes regarded by his critics as the predominant theme that connects all of his poems. This is also why, to Browning's contemporary readers, his poetry sometimes appeared to have a soothing effect in the form of a salvation that readers seek to reaffirm their middle-class notion of faith, which they alternatively use to battle the growing criticism that was emerging in society. Walter Bagehot, for example, was able to observe that 'many of Mr. Browning's works make a demand upon the reader's zeal and sense of duty to which the nature of most readers is unequal', and that:

> Again, Mr. Browning evidently loves what we may call the realism, the grotesque

realism, of Orthodox Christianity. Many parts of it in which great divines have felt keen difficulties are quite pleasant to him. He must see his religion, he must have an 'object-lesson' in believing. He must have a creed that will take, which wins and holds the miscellaneous world, which stout men will heed, which nice women will adore.[35]

Indeed, during the nineteenth century, the 'sense of duty' that is commonly found in Browning's poetry, and the vigorous 'zeal' that his works demand and draw out of his readers, are perhaps what made Browning a popular poet to his contemporary readers in the first place. It is obvious even in his own time that writing in this period of great religious anxiety, Browning had deliberately tried to offer a sense of psychological comfort and protection against religious doubt, which his readers recognised and embraced as if it were a pillar of strength. This, literally, had the effect that 'stout men will heed,' and 'nice women will adore.' This is also where the appeal of Browning lies to his original readers. However, useful as this starting point may be in the interpretation of Browning's poems, it can also be crippling in some ways. From a cultural and historical perspective, for instance, reading each of Browning's professedly religious statements at their face value could imply a certain degree of ignorance of the social 'superstructure' of the era in which the poems were produced (referred to as 'reflection' by Georg Lukács).[36] Indeed, despite the outward evidence in Browning's poetry in which an apparent commitment to faith was reflected, it is difficult to believe that it

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[35] Walter Bagehot, 'Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry', in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St John-Stevas (London: Economist, 1965), II, pp. 321-366 (pp. 353 & 356). Article originally published in *The National Review*, Nov (1864).

[36] See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah & Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin, 1962); and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John & Necke Mander (1957; London: Merlin, 1963).

could have been possible for anyone to be so adamant in a cause to not even give a moment's consideration to alternative views, especially during the difficult decade of the 1850s. In the following paragraphs, therefore, I will consider something that recent critics of Browning have not shown a very strong interest in – the possible existence of doubt within the poems of Robert Browning.

Firstly, as stated earlier, the compilation of *Men and Women* during the 1850s, with its obvious orientation and commitment towards the conventional middle-class religious view, shows that its publication at this particular period of time could not have been a mere coincidence. This fact, if nothing else, shows at least a partial awareness of the religious uncertainties around him, and although it was not an issue he would address directly in his work, it is evident that he had at the very least subconsciously responded to the issue of contemporary religious doubt by publishing such a collection of poems as *Men and Women* at this particular point in time. The problem with this, however, is the following inevitable question: beyond Browning's deliberate and outward endorsement of faith in his poetry, does his relentless exertion of middle-class faith not reflect an inner apprehension regarding the existence of God? Evidence to support this speculation can perhaps be found in Browning's almost mechanical association of middle-class morality to the notion of religion, which is so strong that it sometimes even overshadows the main theme of his poems. It is a view that even critics like Charlton, who are absolutely convinced of Browning's religious sincerity, acknowledge:

> Browning's exhilarating moral teaching is bound up so closely with his particular Christian faith that one must ask whether there is value in it purely as a moral system dissociated from its religious groundwork and foundation. One thing is

> certain. Browning built his moral ideas explicitly and unswervingly on his religious beliefs; and he himself believed that the validity of his moral philosophy depended entirely on the validity of his religion.[37]

Thus, if Browning is indeed unable to distinguish the concept of personal morality from the teaching of Christianity, then this would immediately place Browning's mentality on the same plateau as Tennyson rather than John Stuart Mill. It also means that he would have shared Tennyson's perception of the implication of the dissolution of faith on his morality. In an early essay on Shelley, which was written during the early 1850s but remained suspiciously unpublished during Browning's lifetime,[38] further evidence is uncovered:

> Meantime, as I call Shelley a *moral* man, because he was true, simple-hearted, and brave, and because what he acted so corresponded to what he knew, so I call him a man of *religious mind*, because every audacious negative cast up by him against the Divine, was interpenetrated with a mood of reverence and adoration.[39]

There are two points in this essay which I would like to address and discuss. The first is that, despite Browning's shift of poetic style from the early Shelleyan 'Pauline' to a more Browning-esque one in the 1850s, he nonetheless admires Shelley as much as ever although the ground for that admiration has now been reversed from his youthful interpretation of him as an *atheist* (as one biographer reminds us, Browning, in his youth, often openly 'proclaimed himself an *atheist*

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[37] Charlton, p. 38.
[38] Written in 1852, but remains published until after his death.
[39] Robert Browning, 'Essay on Shelley', in *The Four Ages of Poetry, etc.*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1921), pp. 78-79. My italics.

and vegetarian like Shelley'),[40] to that of a person with a *religious mind* (which seems contradictory). Secondly, by identifying *morality* and *religion* as the two characteristics in Shelley which he respects most, the contradiction between this and his earlier love for Shelley is that Browning, here, is basically professing the importance of these qualities to himself. This is interesting because we know that religion, during the nineteenth century, was regarded as a fundamental institutional form to the middle-class's interpretation of morality, which during the early years of the century was transcended into the image of Victorian cultural identity. Therefore, by confessing them to be principles which he admires most in his idol, Browning is essentially admitting the fact that he, too, acknowledges the notion of middle-class religious and moralistic values as an integral part of his cultural identity. If we are to apply this view to our understanding of Browning's religiousness, it would then become clear that the loss of religion and morality, two subjects on which Browning had displayed a highly characteristic middle-class perception, would have meant no less a loss of personal identity to him than to Tennyson. Would this, therefore, not make Browning's religious optimism almost fundamentally identical to the one that was manifested in the end of *In Memoriam*? If so, while Tennyson struggled to come to terms with his identity crisis, Browning simply chose to shield himself from it by deliberately concentrating only on the positive side of things (as the teller of *In Memoriam* did)? Indeed, given Browning's remarkable and almost unnatural consistency in his proclamation of his faith, and the contradictory view which he held during his youth (which he apparently altered later, as seen in his praise of Shelley as religious rather than atheistic), it would be difficult not to perceive his sense of religious conviction with a grain of scepticism.

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[40] F. E. Halliday, *Robert Browning: His Life and Work* (London, Jupiter, 1975), p. 25. My Italics.

Browning's religious sincerity was first questioned during the 'unreligious and immoral' decadence, when Henry Jones, in 1902, remarked that 'The fundamental error of [Browning's] philosophy lies, I believe, in that severance of feeling and intelligence, love and reason'.[41] What Jones means here by 'feeling', 'love', 'intelligence' and 'reason', is essentially what Tennyson had gone through in *In Memoriam* in his struggle in seeking a reconciliation between his rationality (represented as intelligence and reason) and his faith (represented in feeling and love). Indeed, in his study of Browning, Jones went on to cite numerous examples in which the poet's 'head' and 'heart', despite appearing in his poetic language to be outwardly in coherence, were actually in conflict with each other. This led him to conclude with the belief that Browning's religious assurance was 'a profound error, which contained in it the destruction of morality and religion, as well as of knowledge, to make "the quality of God" a love that excludes reason, and the quality of man an intellect incapable of knowing truth.'[42] Hoxie Fairchild, in his grand survey of English religious poetry, agrees with Jones's interpretation of the poet's religiousness. Almost half a century after Jones's groundbreaking work, Fairchild similarly cautions against being too easily deceived by the all-too-apparent message of Browning's poems. He not only questions Browning's evidential obsession with advocating his religious devotion, but further points out that whenever 'there is the slightest danger that the casuistries of a Blougram or a Sludge [which] might demoralize the reader, the poet adds an epilogue telling him what to think of the shifty rascal.' Fairchild concludes that there must indeed be 'something insecure about the man's personality, something not quite sound or genuine [because] No one who is really strong and confident makes so much

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[41] Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1902), p. 323.
[42] Ibid., p. 319.

noise about it.'[43]

In the essay 'The Private Life of Robert Browning', a similar argument was raised by Richard Altick and he offers a further clue in stating that:

> [U]nlike some of those who held high the banners of the traditional Christian faith, Browning did not, except in a few poems like "A Death in the Desert," specifically attack the movers and shakers.[44]

Indeed, in the three separate studies by Jones, Fairchild, and Altick, a common suggestion seems to be that it would be a mistake to take the words of Browning too trustingly without questioning some of the more subtle contradictions that apparently exist within his proposed religious devotion. These are all legitimate points, but in some of the more recent studies on Browning, the questions raised by these three critics seemed to have been lost among the vast volumes of research done on Browning and his poetry. Not only were these points seldom addressed by modern researchers, but they are, in fact, too often omitted altogether. Why is it so? One easy explanation is perhaps because the position of these three critics differs so drastically from the conventional image of Browning as a 'religious poet', that dealing with them would have required huge undertakings to almost relearn Browning from scratch. But more importantly, these views just differ so much from the conventional deciphering of Browning that it had become too easy to dismiss them from the outset.[45] However, if one

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[43] Hoxie Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry, Vol: IV: 1830-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 135.

[44] Richard D. Altick, 'The Private Life of Robert Browning', *Yale Review*, 41 (1951), 247-262 (p. 259).

[45] Indeed, in many of the more recent studies on Browning, the religious focus which had been a trademark of Browning scholarship for such a long time, had seemingly taken a backseat to other issues to the extent that it is seldom mentioned anymore. Isobel Armstrong, for

were to take a fresh approach to Browning without any preconceived knowledge of him, and reread some of the lines of his poetry, it might then just be possible that a different side of Browning would reveal itself. In 'Gold Hair' (1864), for example, the poet writes:

> The candid incline to surmise of late
> That the Christian faith proves false,
> [...]
> I still, to suppose it true, for my part,
> See reasons and reasons; this to begin:
> 'Tis the faith that launched point-blank her dart
> At the head of a lie – taught Original Sin,
> The Corruption of Man's Heart.[46]

From this poem, although readers do catch a glimpse of the slightest hint of the problem of faith, which lies in the common man's failure to reconcile 'reasons' to it, almost as soon as it is mentioned the direction of the poem turns sharply to the concept of 'Sin' and 'Corruption of Man's Heart', leaving the original question of that doubt unanswered. This, using Fairchild's interpretation, is as if Browning is afraid to look into his own doubt. Therefore as soon as a hint of that doubt is mentioned, he smothers it by seeking an immediate return to the comfort of his self-professed faith. This attitude, or timidity of Browning, is even more

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instance, contributed hugely to our understanding of Browning as a political poet in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Daniel Karlin, meanwhile, reminded us of the poet's sometimes violent and volatile language in *Browning's Hatred* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Both studies depart notably from our traditional understanding of Browning as a religious poet, but are recommended for their fresh and different perspectives on Browning's poetry.

[46] Robert Browning, 'Gold Hair', XXIX. 1-2 & XXX. 1-5.

detectable in 'Christmas-Eve', in which:

> For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
>
> When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
>
> Out of the wandering world of rain,
>
> Into the little chapel again.[47]

Although the poem never revealed what the words were that 'escaped my tongue', under the context of the situation, they are likely to be representation of his doubt as the location where they were uttered – in the 'wandering world of rain' – recalls immediately the biblical notion of being lost in the world without God as the shepherd. It furthermore matches the theme of religious uncertainty of the previous stanzas. But as soon as those words were spoken, the immediate reaction of the speaker is a somewhat desperate spring into the comfort of the 'little chapel'. This, once again, reveals a sense of insecurity in Browning regarding his faith; that he could not even bear a single moment of lingering in the reason of his doubt, but must seek out immediate solace in his conventional religiousness.

To a critic of Browning who finds the poet's religious sincerity convincing, such as Charlton, Crowell, and E. LeRoy Lawson, the common defence again this view is that just because Browning chooses not to develop the opposite view of his argument, it does not mean he is afraid of it because it can simply represent its insignificance in the poet's mind. Lawson, for instance, believes that:

> The total inefficacy of words to describe God has convinced Browning that all words are inadequate symbols. God is, but He is above knowledge [...] Toward a

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[47] Robert Browning, 'Christmas Eve', XXI. 6-9.

> God he does not name but has experienced through hope, he can direct his life [...] There is no proof that this hope will become reality – but a man must hope, if he would be a man. He may choose, Browning believes, to name the object of that hope, or even the hope itself, *God*.[48]

Indeed, Browning's religious conviction is ultimately a hope, but I believe it is also nothing more than that. From Lawson's point of view, this is enough to prove Browning's religious sincerity, because a sincere hope is all that Browning had ever professed his faith to be, and to judge him by what he did not say would be unfair. However, following this argument, would it not also be true that neither has Browning ever fully addressed his doubt and those elements which had, in the first place, prompted his need for such a hope? And in that case, is it not suspicious and unnatural for someone to acknowledge the existence of a problem, yet not even once contemplate it? To rest where Lawson did, therefore, would make the argument an incomplete one because it only addresses one side of the evidence, and ignores too willingly the contradiction on the other side, which in spite of what Browning professes, does appear from time to time in his writings (such as in 'Gold Hair' and 'Christmas Eve', which along with *Men and Women*, do show an awareness on Browning's behalf of the religious doubt of the day). Browning's refusal to address them does not mean he was not aware of them. Furthermore, given Browning's apparent declaration of the importance of religion and morality to himself as well as to his sense of conventional cultural identity, and his failure to address even some of the most common notions of religious doubt of the time, I tend to agree with Fairchild and Altick in viewing Browning's

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[48] E. LeRoy Lawson, *Very Sure of God: Religious Language in the Poetry of Robert Browning* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1974), p. 158.

vociferous proclamation of his faith as somewhat suspicious. Besides Browning's own words (which only represent what the poet wants to reveal to his readers), there is simply not enough evidence to support the claim that he could remain unscathed by the doubt of his time, especially when some of those questions and thoughts are present even in his own poems (which he neither answered nor resolved). As we have seen in Tennyson, to assert and confirm to oneself one's love of God is one thing, but to actually be able to embrace it and resolve once and for all the conflict between one's 'heart' and 'head' is an entirely different matter. While Browning's proclamation may be strong and unshakable, as long as he refuses to address the apparent doubt and contradiction of the time, and possibly even that felt by himself, there is simply no guarding against Browning's 'faith' being identical to the one Tennyson professed in the end of *In Memoriam*. The only thing we can be sure of is that Tennyson forced his conclusion because he had failed to reconcile the two contradicting forces inside himself, whereas Browning simply hid his attempted reconciliation process in order to comfort himself in his 'little chapel'. In either case, it is apparent that both poets have the clear perception that their identity hinges heavily on the conviction of their faith. The truth is simply that the loss of their identity through religious doubt is something neither poet was willing to risk.

IV. The Reconfiguration of Victorian Religious Identity

Ralph Waldo Emerson, during his visits to England, notices the English character to be heavily influenced by religion and he remarks that:

[The] English life [...] is with religion as with marriage. A youth marries in haste; afterwards, when his mind is opened to the reason of the conduct of life, he is asked what he thinks of the institution of marriage and of the right relations of the sexes? 'I should have much to say,' he might reply, 'if the question were open, but I have a wife and children, and all question is closed for me.'[49]

Emerson was probably not very far off in his comparison of the Victorian concept of religion to an impetuous and youthful marriage, in which neither of the participants was really offered a choice, which caused the marriage to turn sour and regretful in the end. Indeed, as was discussed previously, the middle-class revolution of the English education system in the early nineteenth century had left the imprint of an overwhelmingly religious atmosphere on society which, as Emerson suggests, would have blinded them to its flaws from an early age to the point that, when they finally became aware of its imperfection, it was already too late for most to abandon. During the 1850s, as we have observed in the writings of Tennyson, Froude, and Browning, the awareness of an existing problem with faith and the dilemma of being unable to discard it, are growing within an increasingly discontented society. It is a phenomenon which John Ruskin addressed:

> The fact is, we distrust each other and ourselves so much, that we dare not press this [religious] matter; we know that if [...] we turn to our next neighbour, and put to him some searching or testing question, we shall, in nine cases out of ten, discover him to be only a Christian in his own way, and as far as he thinks proper, and that he doubts many things which we ourselves do not believe strongly enough

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[49] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits* (1856; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), p. 214.

to hear doubted without danger.[50]

Ruskin's claim helpfully summarises the two things which we have been able to observe in this chapter. The first is the confirmation of the spread of religious anxiety during the 1850s, when society began to question whether their conventional notion of religion still represented the one infallible dogma that can be counted on as the universal truth under any circumstance. Instead, everyone is now believed to be 'a Christian in his own way', which is really a deterioration in the sense that Christianity is now nothing more than an empty façade which people hang onto for different reasons. This brings up my second point of the reason for this reluctance to let go of a conventional faith that is clearly no longer functional. In the works of Tennyson, Froude, and Browning, we realise that most Victorians are reluctant to let go of their faith because they perceive it as synonymous to Victorian cultural identity. The poems of Tennyson and Browning, as we have seen, offer a reflection on this Victorian cultural identity dilemma, in which, upon the realisation of their dissatisfaction with the traditional middle-class notion of faith, individuals began to display a reluctance and powerlessness to separate themselves from this conventional identity. Tennyson and Browning countered this by respectively, but not dissimilarly, retreating from their rationality to seek comfort in their conventional middle-class ideological identity. But while it may have been possible for Tennyson or Browning to see their actions as 'solution' to their doubt, the problem is more serious when it unsettles an individual to the extent that he/she finds it impossible to ignore their

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[50] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, in *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (1851-1853; London: George Allen, 1902-1912), XI, p. 132.

logic, and be content simply with 'The truth that never can be proved'?[51] This is what happened to Charles Darwin, to whom spirituality proved to be not enough to conquer his logical mind. In *On the Origin of Species* (1859), for instance, he questioned divinity openly in that:

> Do they really believe that at innumerable periods in the earth's history certain elemental atoms have been commanded suddenly to flash into living tissues? Do they believe that at each supposed act of creation one individual or many were produced? Were all the infinitely numerous kinds of animals and plants created as eggs or seed, or as full grown?[52]

While in the later editions of the work, Darwin did soften his question of divinity somewhat and made his accusation less prominent, the fact remains that he refuses to have any further discussion of his faith for the rest of his life, and chooses simply to circumvent the question whenever he is pressured. This shows that, unlike Tennyson and Browning, Darwin was not afraid to look deeper into his religious doubt in order to find an answer. In the end it was his rationality that triumphed, but it was not an easy conclusion. Like so many mid-Victorians of his generation, Darwin, too, used to be a devoted Christian and he even graduated from Cambridge with a degree in theology. So on this level he probably felt a stronger attachment to his faith than many of his contemporaries. But nevertheless, in the end it was with reluctance and hesitation that his disbelief became a fact. In a personal letter to Asa Gray, he confessed the difficulties of his conclusion by admitting that:

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[51] Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', CXXXI, 10.
[52] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859; New York: Collier and Son, 1909), p.500.

> I am conscious that I am in an utterly hopeless muddle. I cannot think that the world, as we see it, is the result of chance; and yet I cannot look at each separate thing as the result of Design.

And that:

> I am in thick mud; the orthodox would say in fetid abominable mud. I believe I am in much the same frame of mind as an old gorilla would be in if set to learn the first book of Euclid... yet I cannot keep out of the question.[53]

And so, the imposing force that religion was able to exert on Victorian cultural identity, proves so strong that even Charles Darwin, who was absolutely convinced in his logics, was troubled by it. In *Father and Son* (1907), Edmund Gosse gives a similar account of the suffering of his father who, like Darwin, had to endure a similar struggle when he perceived an irreconcilability between religion and science. The difference between Gosse and Darwin is that Gosse finds himself unable to abandon either, and in the end was plunged into an emotional and social abyss from which he never recovered. Edmund not only revealed his father's fate in the light that 'the failure of his attempt at the reconciliation of science with religion to have been intended by God as a punishment for something he had done or left undone',[54] but more dramatically:

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[53] Quoted in Neal C. Gillespie, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 87.

[54] Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, ed. Peter Abbs (1907; London: Penguin, 1989), p. 107. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

> On Christmas Day of this year 1857 our villa saw a very unusual sight. My father had given strictest charge that no difference whatever was to be made in our meals on that day [...] but the servants, secretly rebellious, made a small plum-pudding for themselves. Early in the afternoon, the maids [...] kindly remarked that 'the poor dear child ought to have a bit, anyhow', and wheeled me into the kitchen, where I ate a slice of plum-pudding. [...] At length I could bear my spiritual anguish no longer, and bursting into the study I called out: 'Oh Papa, Papa, I have eaten of flesh offered to idols!' [...] He took me by the hand, and ran with me into the midst of the startled servants, seized what remained of the pudding, and with the plate in one hand and me still tight in the other, ran till we reached the dust-heap, when he flung the idolatrous confectionery on to the middle of the ashes, and then raked it deep down into the mass. (111-112)

This 'perverse malady' Gosse was a victim of, was later explained by his son as a result of the 'dislocation of his intellectual system', which:

> Up to this point in his career, he had, as we have seen, nourished the delusion that science and revelation could be mutually justified, that some sort of compromise was possible. [...] Geology certainly *seemed* to be true, but the Bible, which was God's word, *was* true. If the Bible said that all things in Heaven and Earth were created in six days, created in six days they were, – in six literal days of twenty-four hours each. The evidences of spontaneous variation of form, acting, over an immense space of time, upon ever-modifying organic structures, *seemed* overwhelming, but they must either be brought into line with the six-day labour of creation, or they must be rejected. (112-113)

In this passage, Edmund Gosse offered us a picture into the psyche of a typical Victorian mind, and the sense of grief which an individual is sure to experience when he/she realises that self-deception is no longer an option. What follows after this stage are the senses of pain and reluctance in letting go of a cultural belief that has been heavily ingrained in society's concept of identity. It is a dilemma which many mid-Victorians have undoubtedly gone through, although few probably suffered as intensely as the elder Gosse, for the lack of either his scientific background or uncompromising devotion. In general, however, from the examples of Tennyson, Browning, and Gosse, it is evident that the problem with the general Victorian attitude towards religion is that it is incorporated too deeply into their mentality, so that when discrepancy occurs, doubt is cast onto not only their conventional notion of faith, but the entire array of social assumption regarding the structure of their perceived cultural identity. Because of the fundamental association between religion and the nineteenth century perception of Englishness, the fear of the Victorians often comes to the following question: Had the world not been made by God as the Bible asserted, then what about the Victorian morality which the gospel preaches, or the sense of superiority which distinguishes the Christian Englishmen from the 'unenlightened' natives of India or South America? This is what the great Victorian religious dilemma comes down to being about.

Throughout this chapter, I wanted to, first of all, establish the fact that since the 1850s, society was indeed immersed in an unshakable sense religious anxiety, the extensive impact of which can be seen in its reflection in a variety of contemporary writings. Contrary to popular belief, however, the cause of this anxiety has not so much to do with the Victorians' faith in salvation or Christianity, but reflects more of an issue of convention and cultural identity. As I have argued,

the relationship between religion and cultural identity, at the time, is an interlocking one in which each is dependent on the other for definition and conceptualisation. Whether it is Froude, Tennyson, or Browning, the apprehension of these writers is a universal one in which they all express the same fear which the loss of faith implies the loss of their identity. But just as the Victorians' anxiety on religion was kept in check by their need of cultural identity, the dialectical relationship between religion and cultural identity dictates that sooner or later, as reservations begin to surmount institutional forms such as religion, the question would come round ultimately to the legitimacy of Victorian cultural identity itself. In Chapter 5, I will examine this in detail to see how doubts cast on the four institutional forms of religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness, from 1850 to 1870, would lead to the total reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. For the time being, it suffices to remember that the dialectical relationship that exists between religion and Victorian cultural identity is not just a retrospective interpretation of the nineteenth century by modern scholars, but one that is obvious in its own time to the people under its influence (as has been demonstrated throughout this chapter). This is important because the Victorians' awareness of the connection between religion and cultural identity is exactly what would later enable the reconfiguration of their social and cultural pattern, from early moralism to *fin de siècle* decadence. In order to prove this, we must now leave the topic of religion to enter our discussion of other institutional forms.

2. DUTY

Along with religious devotion, the notion of duty represents another important institutional form within the conceptualisation of Victorian cultural identity. Before we begin our discussion on the implication of duty and cultural identity, I must acknowledge that duty, unlike religion, is a notoriously difficult term to define. Whereas the Victorians seem to have a consensus on the broader implication of religion and its constituent values, such as the notion of Christian virtue, duty is often just an ambiguous guideline, a term to which Victorians like to refer to when they feel the need to justify (or denounce) a certain act or deed. George Eliot, for instance, once claimed that the three most crucial words to 'inspiring trumpet-calls of men' are 'the words *God*, *Immortality*, *Duty*',[1] and similarly, one of Charles Kingsley's favourite injunctions is 'fret not nor be [of] doubtful mind. But just do the duty which lies nearest.'[2] Although the two authors seem to be using the term in slightly different senses, the fact remains that both see the concept of duty as something of intrinsic importance to the Victorian way of life. This is why Eliot mentions it in the same breath as 'God' (religion, as we have seen, being another important institutional form in Victorian cultural identity), and Kingsley simply cannot say enough about the importance of doing one's 'duty'. This notion of duty is described by Walter Scott in 1827 as being 'under the necessity of being actuated, or at least appearing to be so, by nobler motives'.[3] In other words, what we have in duty is a magisterial display of the dialectical relationship between various institutional forms and Victorian cultural

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[1] Quoted in Frederick Myers, 'George Eliot', in *Essays: Modern* (London: MacMillan, 1885).
[2] Charles Kingsley, *His Letters and Memories of His Life* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1881), II, p. 107.
[3] Walter Scott, *Miscellaneous Prose Works* (Edinburgh: Cadell and Co., 1827), III, p. 517.

identity. On the one hand, although neither is fully comprehensible to the public, the public nonetheless profess an awareness of a sense of 'nobler motives' which circulates the cultural atmosphere (cultural identity), which in turns creates the social pressure that dictates the 'necessity' of duty. On the other hand, this sense of duty would come to be interpreted by the public as simply 'the right thing to do for a Briton' which, in actuality, is vicariously dictating their sense of cultural identity regarding their definition of the term Briton.

But for our objective of proving the connection (as *perceived* by the Victorians) between duty and cultural identity, and the reconfiguration of that identity as caused by the violation of their own presupposed definition of each institutional form, coming up with a precise and all-incorporating definition for duty is not nearly as important as being able to demonstrate the parallelism between duty, in whatever format registered and recognised by the Victorians, and cultural identity. Instead of trying to deal with the variety of contexts under which the term duty is used by the Victorians, I will instead focus our analysis on one particular, but important, aspect of the Victorian notion of duty – that of social duty – in order to allow a more specified implication of its relation to the question of cultural identity.[4] By examining the writings of various authors and their respective views regarding this concept of duty, we shall see, by the end of this chapter, how their perceptions of duty interact with the contemporary question of identity, thus enabling us to decipher the impact on their sense of cultural identity as conflict erupts between progress and the Victorians' conventional sense of social duty.

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[4] For more information on the variations of Victorians' interpretation of duty (outside of social duty), please refer to the following studies: Houghton, *Victorian Mind*, ch. 8, 10, 11, 13, and 14; Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (1959; London: Longman, 1978), ch. 9; Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London: Fontana, 1971), ch. 4; and Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (London: Penguin, 1993), ch. 5 and 8.

I. Social Duty and the Manifestation of the Two Nations

Social duty, as the term implies, describes the feeling of cultural presumption based on the concept of society (in particular class society), on the belief that those in a higher social position (the middle-class) have an inherent moral obligation to look after those beneath them. It is, on one hand, reminiscent of the traditional Western feudal system which can be blatant at times in the Victorian landlord-peasant relationship. On the other hand, it also finds support from the teachings of the Bible. From whichever angle one looks at it, what is undeniable about the Victorian perception of social duty is that it is a system of belief that is deeply rooted in the very fabric of society, constituting not only a pattern of social behaviour but also the very image of what is perceived to be 'British'. The manufacturer Richard Oastler, for instance, firmly believes that when 'I saw young and helpless neighbours dying excruciatingly [...] I heard their groans, I watched their tears; *I knew they relied on me.*'[5] The sense of responsibility felt by Oastler is exemplary of the Victorians' attitude towards social duty, that both the rich and the poor had come to expect a certain degree of obligation owed to the latter by the former, and that the rich are expected to obligate, honour, and perform that duty (indeed, many hospitals and other public facilities were founded on this concept during the Victorian era). As the nineteenth century matures and the progress of industrialisation continues to absorb an increasingly greater portion of society, this notion of social duty would be developed even further as an institutional cultural form. A good example of this is the existing relationship between labourers and manufacturers, in which both parties would employ the

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[5] Quoted in John. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement, 1830-1855* (London: MacMillan, 1962), p. 425.

mentality of social duty to argue for their polarised causes. One of the arguments for higher wages and better working conditions most frequently used by pre-1850 Victorian factory workers, for instance, is that the manufacturers simply owe this to the workers and had a moral obligation to fulfil their social duty (Marx, however, strongly refutes this principle. In a letter to Engels in 1851, for instance, he criticises the Workers' Association for taking the mistaken strategy of subordinating the workers' freedom to the principle of 'social duty', which 'depersonalises them').[6] The middle-class manufacturers, on the other hand, also use this social principle to their advantage in justifying their continuously ascending social position throughout the nineteenth century. Without passing judgement on who is right or wrong in this situation, it is important for us to observe in this scenario the influence of the concept of social duty in the nineteenth century. In spite of their disagreement, neither side sees the need to question the legitimacy or purpose of having such a system of belief in society, because as an institutional form the concept of duty is simply regarded by the Victorians as part of their social existence, which is as natural as believing in God, at least until the 1850s.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the concept of social duty is undoubtedly of immense influence to the rapid development of industrialisation. However, like many other institutional forms within the concept of Victorian cultural identity, the spirit of social duty which is manifested in the belief of obligation to society based on hierarchy began to lose its significance in the 1850s as competition between local and overseas manufacturers becomes fierce. The emergence of the 'self-made' men, whose rise from the lower class means they

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[6] Karl Marx, *The Collected Works of Marx & Engels* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), XXXIIX, p. 408.

occupy a precarious position in that they are less preoccupied with social duty, also furthered the conflict. Mrs. Gaskell, for instance, who lived in Manchester and remained a keen observer of the spirit of industrialism throughout her life, was able to sum up this attitude through the mouth of her fictional industrialist John Thornton:

> I feel that in my own case it is no good luck, nor merit, nor talent, – but simply the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned, – indeed, never to think twice about them, – I believe that this suffering, which Miss Hale says is impressed on the countenances of the people of Milton, is but the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives. I do not look on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character.[7]

Indeed, the essence of industrialism, in many ways, is about competition and self-advancement. Therefore, to John Thornton and his many real-life counterparts, the notion of duty to fellow men has clearly been superseded by the great industrial work ethic of 'you eat as much as you work.' In other words, as society begins to indulge itself with the notion of self-advancement, because of their dramatic difference in nature the violation of the ethic of duty is unavoidable. During this time, the manufacturing middle-class were so involved in their own social advancement that they no longer had time to fulfil their social duty and worry about the well-being of others. The distribution of wealth, under the rapid development of capitalism and industrialisation, also became more and more uneven, as the number of poor increased by the day and population became more

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[7] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Patricia Ingham (1855; London: Penguin, 1995), p. 85.

condensed (for they were being forced to move into cities to make a living). As a result, the more wealthy Victorians were simply overwhelmed by this and the concept of social duty fell into disarray. John Ruskin, for instance, was able to observe in 1851 that:

> Persons who have any influence in the management of public institutions for charitable education know how common this feeling has become. Hardly a day passes but they receive letters from mothers who want all their six or eight sons to go to college, and make the grand tour in the long vacation, and who think there is something wrong in the foundations of society, because this is not possible. Out of every ten letters of this kind, nine will allege, as the reason of the writers' importunity, their desire to keep their families in such and such a "station of life."[8]

The population of the poor, during the 1850s, was increasing literally by the day, so it is not hard to imagine a scene of thinly-clad unhealthy-looking lower class workers knocking on the doors of their wealthy neighbours, day after day, begging for food and money. Under such circumstances, contemptuous responses as such are to be expected, because the fact is the rich are simply outnumbered. The price of this failure to perform their social duty, however, is a series of crippling blows to any stable notion of Victorian cultural identity, in that the sacredness of 'duty' as fundamental to being British is being directly questioned. In Disraeli's 'Two Nations' argument, one can clearly observe an immediate consequence of this conflict between self-advancement and social duty, which resulted in the question of Victorian cultural identity, which had previously been counting on the support of social duty as an institutional form. Disraeli believes that:

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[8] John Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism* (New York: John Wiley, 1851), pp. 8-9.

between [the rich and the poor] there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.[9]

When the rich and the poor of what is supposed to be one united society are separated into 'two nations', the impact on the concept of cultural identity becomes a significant one, for the reason that it implies the purpose of the existence of cultural identity, which is to offer a collective sense of identity to one unified nation, is no longer observed. In other words, when the social gap between the rich and the poor widens to the extent that it is considered irreparable, the result is the complete undermining of conventional Victorian cultural identity on two levels. Firstly, since the performance of social duty is considered a definitive institutional obligation that distinguishes Britishness, the perception that it is no longer upheld automatically implies the breakdown of such a classification of Victorian cultural identity. Secondly, the manifestation of the 'two nations' situation, which many supposed to have been a result of society's failure to uphold the tradition of social duty, further exposes the innate problem of Victorian cultural identity in raising the question of who it actually represents, the rich or the poor?[10] Since the rich no longer take care of the poor, the poor fall into

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[9] Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, ed. Thom Braun (1845; London: Penguin, 1979), p. 96.

[10] Aside from Disraeli, this issue has also grasped the attention of numerous other writers at the time, thus reflecting the seriousness of the problem. They range from Carlyle's analysis in *Sartor Resartus* (1831), where he exaggeratedly alludes to the situation as that of two hostile 'sects'; as well as the frequent reference to it in newspapers of the time, such as *The Pioneer* which proclaims society to have been divided into 'those who do labour' and 'those who do

destitution and the relationship that previously bound the two groups is severed. The conventionally holistic image of Victorian cultural identity thus faces its biggest dilemma. Back in Thomas Arnold's days, the idea of Britons being united under a set of moralistic middle-class ideologies worked because Britishness was perceived as a singular entity. However, the arrival of the 'two nations' observation effectively shattered this myth. Indeed, shortly after 1850, the concern of Disraeli was echoed by many. Contemporary texts reveal a particularly common observation of the time to be to perceive the waning of social duty as a national disgrace. The result of this is the popularity of social novels during the 50s, which unanimously advocated the revival of the concept of middle-class's social obligation.[11]

In *Bleak House* (1853), for instance, the characters Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle were created for no particular reason other than to satirise society's growing negligence towards the fulfilment of social duty. In many ways, it is in *Bleak House* that Dickens first reaches maturity in his criticism of social poverty, and he has chosen his theme wisely by criticising, at this particular period in time, the state of social duty in England and the lack of care for one's fellow countrymen. Mrs. Jellyby's obsession with Africa is a particularly effective illustration of this problem. Her 'curious habit of seeming to look a long way off'[12] represents the conventional Arnoldian view which distinguishes social duty from philanthropy, in the sense that social duty constitutes a nation's obligation to itself and itself alone. In relating this view to the wider problem of conventional

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nothing'. See Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*; the quotation from *The Pioneer* is cited in Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 131.

[11] See Josephine M. Guy, *The Victorian Social Problem Novel* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996); and Kate Flint, *The Victorian Novelist: Social Problem and Social Changes* (London: Routledge, 1987).

[12] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Norman Page, intro. J. Hillis Miller (1853; London: Penguin, 1985), p. 85. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Victorian cultural identity, Dickens states it even more clearly in Caddy's sharp response to Esther's enquiry about her 'duty as a child'. Caddy's answer is as follows:

> 'O! don't talk of duty as a child, Miss Summerson; where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa, I suppose! Then let the public and Africa show duty as a child; it's much more their affair than mine' (96)

The feeling of Caddy can basically be summed up as follows: If a mother can neglect her maternal (social) duty and disregard the well-being of her daughter, then the daughter, by the same token, shall owe no obligation whatsoever to her mother. While on the surface, this can be interpreted as simply a concern regarding traditional family values, deeper down, by considering factors such as Mrs. Jellyby's seemingly unrelated obsession with foreign *nations*, as well as Dickens's apparent awareness of the 'two nations' debate of the time, we realise that it represents a far more serious warning from Dickens. If the nineteenth century notion of 'duty' is to be understood as a system of obligations which dictates one Victorian's relationship to another, then in a sense both Mrs. Jellyby's maternal duty and the greater concept of social duty can be seen as a direct manifestation of it. Therefore, by questioning Mrs. Jellyby's sense of duty to her daughter, Dickens is at the same time questioning the very fabric of this structure of duty, which as an institutional form instantly transcends our interpretation of *Bleak House* from a novel of domestic value, to a critique of Victorian cultural identity.[13] The message from Dickens is apparently that if the rich abandon their

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[13] Critics such as Frances Armstrong, for instance, are adamant in their conviction that 'Dickens's novel could not have been anything else but home.' (*Dickens and the Concept of Home*

moral obligation of performing social duties to the poor (as Mrs. Jellyby neglects her maternal duty), the rest of society, who (like Caddy) had traditionally relied on those above them to carry out their duties, would naturally feel that they no longer owe any allegiance to that society, thus causing the Arnoldian image of cultural identity as based on the concept of duty to break down and be forgotten. The strongest confirmation we have in this reading of *Bleak House* is in Dickens's distinctive emphasis on Mrs. Jellyby's obsession with foreign, hence non-British, nationalities. Caddy's proclamation of 'let the public and Africa show duty as a child; it's much more their affair than mine' is a warning not only of the danger of a child losing faith in her mother, but also a nation losing faith in its sense of belonging and identity. Edgar Johnson, among other critics, agrees with this interpretation of *Bleak House* as he believes that Mrs Jellyby's 'dreaming moonily of helping the African natives on the banks of Borioboola-Gha' is an echo of the fact that 'she ignores the horrors of the London slums and neglects her own family.'[14] Further evidence of the text having a purpose of bringing society's attention to social duty can be found in the death of Jo:

> Dead, your majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (705)

From royalty to clergy, gentry to the mass, within the entire Victorian social

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(London: UMI, 1990), p. 1.) However, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, given the widespread awareness of the question of cultural identity from 1850-70, it would be impossible for anything written during this period to be completely free from the cultural preoccupation that was troubling society at the time (although they may choose to concentrate on one of the more important institutional forms). In the next chapter, I will discuss in greater detail the cultural implication of Dickens's domestic narratives.

[14] Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (London: Gollancz, 1953), II, p. 768.

spectrum, no one is spared by Dickens as he accuses society of its negligence of duty, and implies this negligence to be the direct cause of Jo's tragedy. Indeed, when John Lucas praises *Bleak House*'s 'power to disturb', and Dickens as the 'spokesman of the conscience of his age', this sense of shaming the public while trying to raise society's consciousness regarding social duty is probably what he had in mind. Lucas, furthermore, proposes that the main goal of Dickens in *Bleak House* is to 'force his readers into an unprotected awareness of the age in which they live, to present them with issues which as they read, will more and more impinge upon their consciousness'.[15] This is true because whether it is the plot of the novel or the wordings chosen by Dickens in various chapters, *Bleak House* undeniably rings of social criticism throughout. This is also why, in his collection of criticisms of *Bleak House*,[16] A. E. Dyson includes a selection of the 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, because it is exactly this kind of awareness of the worsening situations of the English working class which Dickens had hoped to promote and help in *Bleak House*, by making society more aware of their 'duty' to their fellow Englishmen.[17]

Contemporary reactions to the novel, indeed, seem to confirm this view. The *Westminster Review*, for instance, praises *Bleak House* for its ability to turn 'every thought suggested in it towards what is good and pure and noble.'[18] And equally strong and emotional is the reviewer of *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, who repents

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[15] John Lucas, *The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 204.

[16] A. E. Dyson (ed.), *Dickens; Bleak House: A Casebook* (London: MacMillan, 1969).

[17] For more information on *Bleak House* and the contemporary social background it was written under, see Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942); in which the author set out to retrace and connect many of the references in the text to actual events that happened, which allows House to concede *Bleak House*, among other of Dickens's novels, to be 'reliable source books of history' in its truthful and honest reflection of the spirit of the time (p. 30). For further views that support this claim, see John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957); and John Carey, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens's Imagination* (London: Faber, 1973).

[18] 'Contemporary Literature of England', *The Westminster Review*, 4 (1853), 569-593 (p. 591).

the fact that 'we weep over him [Jo] and give him the sympathies which we withhold from the real Joes we encounter in our daily walks.'[19] Moreover, even in the *Eclectic Review*, despite the protective stance of the magazine towards mid-Victorian philanthropies, it nonetheless recognises the aim of the novel to be that of shifting the public's focus back onto the issues of 'poverty, ignorance, and heathenism which abounds at home.'[20] Thus on the issue of raising public awareness regarding social duty, Dickens had no doubt achieved some success; but as to whether the working-class had benefited from this increased awareness, they probably had not. This is because, for one, awareness does not always transcend into actions; and two, society will soon be overwhelmed by the attitude of self-help which literally pronounced the death of the middle-class moralistic concept of duty.

II. Self-Help

On the surface, the publication of Samuel Smiles's *Self-help* in 1859 created in society an atmosphere of self-advancement that reacts well with the spirit of industrialisation and capitalism that epitomises the Victorian age, however, inadvertently and less obviously, its principle also creates a cultural dilemma as it creates a direct conflict between 'duty for oneself' and social duty, which further weakens the position of duty as an institutional form. Self-help was an overnight phenomenon. The book by Samuel Smiles which popularised the term 'self-help',

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[19] 'Characters in *Bleak House*', *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art*, 2 (1853), 558-562 (p. 561).

[20] '*Bleak House*', *Eclectic Review*, 6 (1853), 665-679 (p. 677).

sold over 20,000 copies within the first year of its publication,[21] and was able to accomplish the rare feat of attracting an audience that spans both the middle and working-class (which enabled it to influence society on an extremely wide spectrum). Indeed, since its first printing, *Self-help* has become almost a defining image of Victorian society, in which the popular notion of owing a duty to oneself, to work hard and accumulate wealth, became almost synonymous with our popular twentieth century image of Victorian persistency. In terms of cultural identity, however, the attitude of self-help is a problem because it symbolises the exact opposite of the idea of social duty, since the possibility of social advancement through hard work provides justification for the existing social hierarchy, in which the wealthier citizens are no longer obliged by the code of duty to provide for their subordinate anymore. More importantly, this fact is not lost on the contemporary Victorians; for instance, in an article published in 1879, the writer states that:

> The first and perhaps the most widely-known of Dr. Smiles's works is 'Self-Help.' The name, as he himself confesses, is in some respects unfortunate, because it has been used to bring home to the author the charge of glorifying selfish and self-seeking success.[22]

Although published twenty years after the first printing of *Self-help*, this article is informative because it basically sums up for us the popular consensus on *Self-help* during this period. Whether Smiles truly regretted the title or not is impossible to tell, but this article shows that for every praise received by *Self-help*, it must have

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[21] Houghton, *Victorian Mind*, p. 191.
[22] 'Dr. Smiles's Works on *Self-Help*', *Quarterly Review*, 147 (1879), 202-228 (p. 205).

received an equal amount of criticism which connotatively interpreted its principle to be 'glorifying selfish and self-seeking success'. Although the author did not state why such an attitude is considered a problem by the Victorians, we can quite easily determine this by looking at the fundamental difference between the ideas of self-help and social duty.

As stated before, the principal doctrine of social duty is about instilling in society a sense of obligation from one class (the higher) to another (the lower). The teachings of self-help, however, completely devastate this concept firstly by re-prioritising one's sense of duty from others-regarding to self-regarding, and secondly by its promise of social advancement via self-help which further undermines the perpetuity of the class system, thus effectively removing one of the more important foundations of the concept of social duty. The conflict of these two ideas is perhaps best realised in the polarising principles of Samuel Smiles and Thomas Carlyle, in whom the concepts of self-help and social duty are respectively exemplified.

To Thomas Carlyle, ideas such as social reform and hero-worship are important because they represent the ultimate embodiment of the spirit of social duty, in that the ultimate aim of both is to take care of one's society and its fellow citizens. The 'Condition of England' question is quintessentially an idea that evolved out of the concept of social duty, because it is based on a foundation of believing that those in a higher social position have a moral and social responsibility to those beneath them. For this reason, Carlyle believed social reform to be the just thing to do, because the Victorian code of social duty – which is one of the elements that makes them distinctly Englishmen – dictates and demands this. Furthermore, Carlyle's faith in hero-worship, as well as his defence of slavery, are essentially based on this same principle of social duty. The hero's

pride is synonymous with the pride of the Victorian middle-class as they both echo Richard Oastler's moral beliefs on social duty and obligations. In *Past and Present*, for instance, he writes:

> Noble fighters, this is the land we have gained; be I Lord in it, - what we will call *Law-ward*, maintainer and *keeper* of Heaven's *Laws*: be I *Law-ward*, or in brief orthoepy *Lord* in it, and be ye Loyal Men around me in it; and we will stand by one another, as soldiers round a captain, for again we shall have need of one another![23]

In short, Carlyle seeks to illustrate the moral belief of the middle-class regarding social duty in its most conventional and ideological form. The allusion to soldier and captain, for instance, is reminiscent of the middle-class's belief in social duty, in that not only does it justifies the belief in class distinction in which some men are born to lead while others must follow, but it also strives to emphasise the inter-dependent relationship between the two in which 'we shall have need of one another', thus placing the focus of social duty not on inequality, but on the perception of a mutual benefit to both parties. In his defence of slavery, similarly, one can detect an underlying tone that supports and reflects this feeling of pride of the British nation over any foreign lands and races.[24] To Samuel Smiles, however, this set of middle-class principles so cherished by Carlyle and others, simply could not be more wrong. In the opening chapter of *Self-Help*, for instance, he

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[23] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, intro. Frederic Harrison (1843; London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1897), p. 193.

[24] For more on the philosophies of Carlyle and social duty, see Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London: Chapman and Hal, 1899), 5 vols.; Heffer, *Moral Desperado*; Michael Levin, *The Condition of England Question: Carlyle, Mill, Engels* (London: MacMillan, 1998); Eric Bentley, *The Cult of Superman: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche* (London: Hale, 1947); and Frederick William Roe, *The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin* (London: Kennikat, 1969).

writes that:

> Old fallacies as to human progress are constantly turning up. [...] We are to wait for Caesars, and when they are found, "happy the people who recognise and follow them." [...] a doctrine which, if taken as a guide, must, by destroying the free conscience of a community, speedily prepare the way for any form of despotism. Caesarism is human idolatry in its worst form – a worship of mere power, as degrading in its effects as the worship of mere wealth would be. A far healthier doctrine to inculcate among the nations would be that of Self-Help[25]

Smiles's mockery of the concept of Caesarism, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is a direct reference to Carlyle's hero-worship and a challenge to the middle-class ideal of Victorian social hierarchy. Instead of praising the righteous and compassionate hero figure who symbolises the concept of social duty, Smiles has replaced it with a tyrannical Caesar who cares nothing for the mass and only for himself, a theory which clearly disapproves of the mass that wait for the despotic leader to perform his social duty and thereby rescue them from misery. To Smiles, a wiser way would be to take one's future into one's own hands and prosper through the process of self-help. The departure of this idea from the traditional concept of middle-class social duty, in a time when society was warming up to the idea of self-help as a desirable characteristic in their culture, would have had the same impact on their notion of cultural identity as the collapse of religion had during the same era. This is because, in both cases, a fundamental component of the makeup of conventional middle-class Englishness, which was synonymous with Victorian cultural identity, has been discredited

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[25] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859; London: IEA Health and Wealthfare Unit, 1997), p. 2.

while new ideas that are emerging at the time, are unable to replace them quickly enough. To further complicate the matter, the impact of *Self-help* on the question of identity is that not only did Smiles succeed in altering the public's mentality towards the convention of social duty, but he also expounded the fact that in describing the attitude of self-help, he is really describing what he considered to be a quintessential characteristic of Englishness, which brought the notions of social duty and self-help to a direct confrontation (as both claim to be a truthful representation of Englishness). Throughout the entire *Self-help* series, for instance, not only did Smiles constantly refer to self-help as the main cause of the 'glory of England' (which implies its being a fundamental component of Englishness), but as Adrian Jarvis points out, Smiles, at one point, even contemplated writing a book specifically on the English race and its work ethic.[26] Smiles's contemporary readers, furthermore, also seem to be particularly receptive to this idea of self-help being a legitimate quality of the English race. *Fraser's Magazine*, for instance, states that:

> The noble quality of self-help which is so finely illustrated in Brindley's career has long been, and still remains, the distinguishing characteristic of Englishmen; to it, as Mr. Smiles shows, we owe our rank in the scale of nations; by its means individuality is cherished, and individuality is the true secret of greatness in nations as in men.[27]

By referring to the set of principles preached by *Self-help* as the 'distinguishing characteristic of Englishmen', what is happening, in essence, is a shift in the

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[26] Adrian Jarvis, *Samuel Smiles and the Construction of Victorian Values* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), p. 154.

[27] '*Self-help*', *Fraser's Magazine*, 60 (1860), 778-786 (p. 779).

popular mentality of the time in that the idea of self-help is gaining prominence at the expense of conventional social duty. It is also true that the public probably did not recognise this replacement as a conscious and deliberate process. As I have already demonstrated, a fundamental conflict between the ideas of social duty and self-help nonetheless and incontestably exists, thus the ascent to prominence of one would inevitably come at the expense of the other, whether it was registered by the public or not. And furthermore, as I will go on to demonstrate in Chapter 5, the decline of social duty was very much a principal reason for the dissolution of Victorian pride, which in turn would have a direct impact on the collapse of conventional Victorian cultural identity.

If the article from *Fraser's Magazine* demonstrates an emerging attitude in society that supports the idea of self-help as a representation of Victorian cultural identity, then on the opposite side there is also a conservative presence which obstinately opposes and condemns the idea of self-help, and sees it as a threat to conventional Victorian cultural identity. This conflict is observable in the battle between *Self-help* and its critics, which took place during the early 1860s. Despite the obvious success and popularity of *Self-help*, almost immediately after its publication, criticism begins to emerge in society denouncing *Self-help* as being selfish, immoral, and utterly devoid of any decency that social duty represents. We have already seen a summary of this feeling in the 1879 *Quarterly Review* article. Prior to it, a feeling of hostility towards *Self-help* can be detected in writings from conservative writers. J. A. Froude, for instance, despite his obvious disillusionment with religion, nonetheless seems to have Samuel Smiles and *Self-Help* in mind when he criticises his perception of the contemporary attitude:

> To push on, to climb vigorously on the slippery steps of the social ladder, to raise

> ourselves one step or more out of the rank of life in which we were born, is now converted into a duty.[28]

And similarly, in J. W. Stapleton's account of the state of social morality in 1860, we find a similar condemnation of the attitude of self-help:

> In this strife the greatest and the strongest must of necessity be the most unscrupulous. Honour, truth and virtue are sacrificed altogether. In the battle of life every impediment must first be cast away. Stripped of his clothes the strong and resolute wrestler stands forth naked, slippery, suspicious, on his guard; the living incarnation of concentrated selfishness, modeled by the nineteenth century.[29]

Although neither of the works quoted above made any direct reference to Smiles's name, it is clear from the context that they opposed strongly the principles of self-help which Smiles' name seems to be synonymous with. Indeed, what this attitude has come to represent to many mid-Victorians is that of a selfish desire that is only concerned with the well-being of oneself, which directly contradicts the conventional middle-class ideal of social duty.[30] These kinds of public resistance towards this idea of self-help, in fact, were so obvious that even a foreigner in England couldn't help but notice it. Hyppolyte Taine, for instance, who travelled to England during the late 1850s and early 1860s, was able to perceive from Victorian society the following impression:

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[28] J. A. Froude, 'England and her Colonies', in *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (1867; London: Bungay, 1878), II, p. 206.

[29] J. W. Stapleton, *The Great Crime of 1860* (London: E. Marlborough, 1861), pp. 5-6.

[30] For more information on how Samuel Smiles is sometimes viewed by the Victorian public as 'a Philistine concerned only with success', and that he 'fostered snobbery and selfishness', see R. Blatchford, 'Of Samuel Smiles and *Self-Help*', *The Clarion*, 13 July, 1923; and Asa Briggs, 'The Gospel of Self-Help', in *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society*, ed. Gordon Marsden (London: Longman, 1990).

> [T]he monied man and the man of business is inclined to selfishness; he has not the disinterestedness, the large and generous views which suit a chief of the country, he does not know how to sink self, and *think of the public.*

And because of which, he further observes, the Victorians were disinclined towards the idea of a 'monied man' being a gentleman, since the unshakeable belief is that:

> [A] real gentleman is a real noble, a man worthy of commanding, upright, disinterested, *capable of exposing himself and even of sacrificing himself for those whom he leads.*[31]

There are perhaps two things we can decipher from Taine's account of the mid-nineteenth century Victorian society. The first one is that it offers further social evidences of the anti-Smiles sentiments that existed during this particular period of Victorian history, in which the attitude is one that somewhat despises the 'selfishness' that characterises the industrial 'monied man' (the same mentality that *Self-help* would portray in a drastically different light). Secondly (and far more importantly), it tells us the significance of the idea of social duty which still occupied the minds of certain Victorians; by denying the 'monied man' who does not 'think of the public' the title of the gentleman, it is clear that society still believed heavily in the morality and integrity that are associated with one's ability to perform one's social duty. Although criticism as such would emerge frequently

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[31] Hyppolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, trans. W. F. Rae (London: Strahan, 1872), pp. 172 & 175. My Italics.

and regularly throughout Smiles's writing career, history shows that the trend of the time would nonetheless drift closer and closer towards Smiles's preaching of self-help (pushed along by the rapidly developing atmosphere of capitalism and imperialism) rather than otherwise. Beatrice Webb, for example, in her memoir of her father, gave further evidences of the popularisation of this attitude by recalling the philosophy of her father, a 'self-made' Victorian industrialist:

> He was an honourable and loyal colleague [...] But he thought, felt and acted in terms of personal relationship and not in terms of general principles; he had no clear vision of the public good [...] Any other conduct he scoffed at as moral pedantry. Hence he tended to prefer the welfare of his family and personal friends to the interests of the companies over which he presided, the profits of these companies to the prosperity of his country, the dominance of his own race to the peace of the world.[32]

Webb's father was not only unashamed to embrace the principle of self-help, but he actually welcomed and embraced it and even scoffed at the conventional 'moral pedantry' of social duty. This shows that the attitude of the time has indeed changed, and social duty – the preaching of looking after the welfare of another – has seemingly been outmanoeuvred by the new attitude of self-help which focuses on the well-being of the self rather than that of other.

In an article that appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860, the transition of popular social perspective from the morality of social duty to the concept of self-help is stated even more clearly:

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[32] Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, 1926), pp. 5-6.

I have a great opinion of successful men; and I am not ashamed to confess it.

It was the fashion, some years ago, to sneer at Success – nay, indeed, sometimes to revile it [...] But a healthier social philosopher is now enthroned amongst us. We have begun to think that men who make their way to the front, becoming rich or famous by the force of their personal characters, must, after all, have something in them.[33]

Aside from the obvious praise for the principle of self-help, what this article has successfully done is to sum up the current shift of popular mentality regarding the notion that an obvious change has taken place from society abiding strictly by the middle-class moral of social duty, to adopting a new mentality that embraces the Smilesian doctrine of seeking self-advancement and wealth. In relation to conventional Victorian cultural identity, however, the obvious problem with the emergence of the idea of self-help and its acceptance by the public (as reflected both in the success of the series and the generous reviews it received from contemporary reviewers) is that it simply brings up too many conflicting notions to the conventional ideal of social duty. This is further deepened by the fact that supporter of both sides claimed that their ideology represented the essence of Englishness during the 1860s. Because of the struggle between the two conflicting forces, some literature of the time reflected an attempt by some who strove to incorporate the principle of self-help into the conventional ideal of social duty. In an article that appeared in *MacMillan's Magazine* in 1860, for instance, a contributor wrote:

A man is "architect of his own fortune;" very true: but it does not follow that he is

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[33] 'Success', *Cornhill Magazine*, 2 (1860), 729-741 (pp. 729 & 731).

> or can be builder, carpenter, bricklayer, hodman, mortar-mixer and all [...] There is Wedgwood, another of your self-made man: see how, to the last, others also help to make him, and then he to make others.[34]

The argument of this article (along with many others written during the same period) is clear: the success of any of the individuals cited by Smiles ultimately depended not on their 'ability' to help themselves, but on social duty on which 'others also help to make him, and then he to make others.' This anonymous reviewer began the article by alluding to another popular middle-class dogma – the gospel – which states:

> it was ruled by the supreme authority that it is not good for man to be alone. This ruling, we take it, has determined not only the undesirableness, but also the impossibility of absolute solitude and self-containedness in the true man. (402)

This statement essentially sets the tone for the entire article in which the polarising principles of social duty and self-help are combined into one; no matter how determined and talented an individual proves to be, he nonetheless must depend on others performing their social duty for him in order to succeed. The reviewer then goes on to cite numerous examples of individuals listed by Smiles in *Self-help*, and argues painstakingly, one-by-one, how each of these individuals had received social duties from others (no matter how minute), which enabled them to achieve individual distinctions. Regarding Wedgwood, for example, the reviewer listed Sir William Hamilton as his benefactor of social duty who 'lent

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[34] '*Self-help*', *MacMillan's Magazine*, 1 (1860), 402-406 (pp. 403-404). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

him specimens of ancient art', of which 'Wedgwood's ingenious workmen produced the most accurate and beautiful copies' (404), never-minding the fact that Hamilton was actually Wedgwood's employer at the time and that Wedgwood actually had to struggle very hard to be able to get Hamilton's contract in the first place. Similarly, in the case of William Herschel, M. S. Lindsay, and others, the writer likewise places a lot of effort into elaborating even the most trivial matters in order to attribute their successes to the principles of social duty, such as the incident where the 'captain of a steamer' took pity on Lindsay and 'told him that he would give him his passage if he would trim the coals in the coal-hole of the steamer' (403); or the 'Schools and Schoolmasters' (404) from whom Hugh Miller learnt how to read and write. In cases where absolutely nothing could be found, such as in the case of William Herschel whom Smiles specifically mentions 'began to study mathematics, unassisted by any "master"',[35] the reviewer was undeterred and in the end was able to attribute the principles of social duty in his success to 'one so long dead and gone as he who set forth axioms of geometry, at the court of an Alexandrian Ptolemy!' (404). From these citations, it is clear that the reviewer was prepared to give up neither the principles of self-help nor social duty, and was determined to find a compromise between them no matter how far he had to stretch his argument.

Nevertheless, despite the article's obvious misinterpretation of *Self-help*, and the author's obstinate intention to regard self-help as a reaffirmation (rather than contradiction) of social duty, it more significantly points to the development of a social rift between self-help and the conventional Victorian notion of duty, which this article seeks to reconcile by attempting to portray Smiles in Arnoldian fashion. However, the perceived cultural discomfort as exposed by self-help is further

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[35] Smiles, *Self-help*, p. 87

disclosed by the reviewer at the end of the article, in which he claims:

> Thousands of self-helpers, that speak, and shall speak the English mother-tongue, will understand that by its writing its writer has proved to them how real and how worthy is the help that the self-helper must and does receive from others. (406)

This passage not only points out the intricate relationship between the conventional middle-class principles of social duty and the perceived identity of Englishness, but also the problem posed by the idea of self-help to the concept of social duty. The reviewer's effort in trying to reconcile the two polarising notions, in many ways, reflects society's perception of the imminent danger that looms with the middle-class morality of social duty being progressively and slowly displaced by the Smilesian self-help. Thus, in order to preserve the conventional sense of cultural identity (which was constructed in the first place on the ideology of social duty) of those who speak 'the English mother-tongue', either self-help must be suppressed, or be interpreted in a way that does not conflict with the institutional form of social duty. As history will show, however, despite the effort of this particular reviewer, the dissimilarities between social duty and self-help are simply too great to overcome. Once the Victorian era progressed past the 1860s, therefore, much like religion, the concept of social duty as a form of 'cultural elaboration' that was supposed to represent British cultural identity, would succumb to the pressure of changing social priorities and perspectives, forcing society to re-evaluate its conceptualisation of itself and its culture. In the following section we will proceed to examine this issue in further detail.

III. The Re-interpretation of Social Duty after the 1860s

As stated earlier, social duty is the representation of the greater middle-class notion of duty which incorporates a wide spectrum of issues, from Tennyson's association of it with everyday tasks, to Richard Oastler's specific interpretation of it in terms of social structure and class obligations. If the mixed reception of *Self-help* in the 1860s and 70s underlines a sense of confusion and uncertainty concerning duty as an institutional form, then, against that, the writings of George Eliot and George Meredith, during the same period, exemplify the emerging feeling of wanting to re-examine the Victorian code of duty as a whole, and to re-evaluate it in relation to society's self-defined image of cultural identity.

George Eliot first achieved literary fame as the author of *Adam Bede* (1859), but it was in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), her next novel, that her daring criticism regarding the Victorians' sense of blind devotion to the middle-class concept of duty was revealed. In her portrayal of Maggie Tulliver as 'a character essentially noble but liable to great error – error that is anguish to its own nobleness',[36] what Eliot is determined to show is that we are all liable to errors which makes the fantasy of being able to live life according to a strict and inhuman code of conduct an impossible task; such value and principle were questioned by the novelist. The true dilemma of *Mill* is exemplified in the fact that despite Maggie Tulliver's admiration and respect for Tom (who endorses his duty), she nonetheless finds herself unable to relate to her brother's strict middle-class principles regarding his 'duty' to their father and the heritage of St. Ogg's. If Tom's sense of duty is deliberately portrayed to reflect conventional English middle-class social values,

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[36] George Eliot, 'Letter to John Blackwood, 9 July, 1860', in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 248-249.

in the sense that his belief in justice, selflessness, and the inflexible principle reflected in his character mimic exactly the idea of social values that the Victorians were brought up to believe in, then Maggie, in her free spirit that knows no bounds whether in speeches and actions, epitomises the sense of longing for liberty that the contemporary code of duty that surrounds Eliot was suppressing. In an early episode in which Tom and his friend Bob become involved in a fight over a halfpenny, this can be seen clearly as Tom declared after his victory that:

> "I don't want your halfpenny; I wouldn't have kept it. But you wanted to cheat: I hate a cheat. I shan't go along with you anymore," he added, turning round homeward, not without casting a regret towards the rat-catching and other pleasures which he must relinquish along with Bob's society.[37]

Tom's attitude would be familiar to contemporary readers as that of a strict, rigid, and unforgiving person whose sentiments echo exactly the notion of moralistic duty which the Arnoldian middle-class discourse has successfully instilled in the Victorians as part of their cultural identity. The problem, however, is that it is a sentiment which Maggie (and George Eliot) does not and could not agree with. This is not because Maggie is a bad person, but she is nonetheless treated by people around her as one because of her inability to comply with this convention. Indeed, ever since her childhood, Maggie has always been considered an outcast from her family because of her refusal to conform to her social role and act according to the notion of duty imposed on her by society. For example, when Mrs. Tulliver, who believes it the duty of 'a little girl to go out in her best bonnet',

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[37] Eliot, *Mill*, p. 51. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

tries to curl Maggie's hair, Maggie defiantly 'rushed from under her hands and dipped her head in a basin of water standing near – in the vindicative determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day.' (27) When we read passages such as this, we must be mindful of the historical reader-response context which Eliot was no doubt aware of. Maggie's individuality outside of the expectation of her family and society, which happened more than once during her childhood, symbolically signifies George Eliot's criticism on the popular reference of Arnoldian duty as an institutional form. For despite Maggie's nonconforming outbursts, Eliot was careful in portraying her heroine to the readers as unmistakably gentle and kind in nature. This suggests to us that, in creating this polemical character that is at the same time unconventional yet lovable, Eliot is deliberately drawing a line between the concepts of morality and duty, in the hope of convincing her readers that, despite what a conservative mind may suggest, the goodness of Victorian cultural identity doesn't necessarily have to be achieved through their conventional notion of middle-class duty.

As I have been arguing, the cultural discourse that is central to *Mill* is the portrayal of the sense of conflict between traditional duty and one's sense of individuality, which is further manifested in the contrasting representation of the Tulliver siblings. If the attitude of Tom represents the Victorian middle-class ideal of duty in its most conventional form, then Maggie's position is an awkward and ambiguous one. The main tragedy of the novel lies in the fact that while Tom's position is not one which Maggie always agrees with, she finds it impossible to fault Tom both because of her love for him and the realisation that he only does what he does because his sense of duty had taught him those are the 'right' things to do. This is why she sometimes wishes she could be more like Tom, whose life is so much simpler because his rigid (and limited) sense of duty allows him to 'fix

his mind with a steady purpose, and disregard everything else' (288). But on the other hand, Maggie also knows that she can never be like Tom, because she is blessed (or cursed) by her ability to break away from social constraints and thus avoid seeing things narrowly as Tom does. Her difficulty, therefore, is that she understands Tom's point of view but cannot make Tom understand hers. This fundamental difference of opinions between the siblings is one that is most perceptible in their respective treatments of Philip Wakem. When at school together, Tom, despite secretly taking a liking to his schoolmate, stubbornly refuses to let any friendship develop because he 'never quite lost the feeling that Philip, being the son of a "rascal," was his natural enemy' (166). Maggie, by contrast, 'could not help looking with growing interest at the new schoolfellow, although he was the son of that wicked Lawyer Wakem, who made her father so angry' (177). This shows that while Tom's vision is obscured by his sense of duty to his father which society expects of him, Maggie, unconfined by the shackles of this sense of middle-class social values, can see the world much more open-mindedly. In Tom's mentality, therefore, one sees the conventional ideal of Victorian duty and all its flaws, but in Maggie's personality one is able to read an opinion that questions this uncompromising code of duty and its *raison d'être*.

Throughout the novel, Maggie is intentionally portrayed by Eliot as a victim of society's code of duty, who, despite her good nature, was constantly misunderstood by her prejudiced family, neighbours, and friends. As a child, she was given names such as 'small Medusa' (98), a 'gypsy', and is often described as being 'half wild' (104) to illustrate the perception of her as an outcast of her surrounding *English* society; but once grown up, when 'this once "contrairy" child was become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will', family members began to congratulate themselves on the fact of her 'growing up so good' (294).

This illustrates Eliot's perception of the connection between duty and Victorian cultural identity, in the sense that unless one becomes 'submissive' to the code of contemporary middle-class value regarding duty, one can neither be considered English nor Victorian because such identities are dependent on one behaving according to a strict code of middle-class principles. Eliot obviously does not agree with this, thus, in *Mill*, she meticulously set up her narration so that it is plain to the readers that Maggie is a good and moralistic child, in spite of her nonconforming behaviour. The question Eliot puts to readers is whether the mentality and rationality behind following the middle-class code of duty, and regarding it as a synonymous definition of Englishness, is just when it is clear that it is possible to achieve morality and goodness without following the 'code'. During the 1850s, indeed, with the position of the church visibly weakening and society's faith in the conventionality of Victorian cultural identity shaken, the opportunity has arrived for criticism of the uncompromising middle-class notion of duty (and its significance to cultural identity) to emerge and to be taken seriously. Our reading of *Mill* reveals that it is exactly because of this blind (and senseless) devotion to the notion of duty that tragedy occurred around Dorlcote Mill.

During the climax of the novel in which Maggie's 'elopement' with Stephen takes place, the question and criticism regarding this conventional sense of middle-class duty also reached its prominence. While Maggie's struggle against the sense of duty that binds her to her father and brother's principles, despite her better judgement, is a cause which most readers felt sympathetic towards, her elopement with Stephen had seemingly crossed the line which most readers dared not cross. In an unsigned review in *The Guardian* in 1860, for instance, the reviewer deemed that there 'is a clear dislocation in the story, between Maggie's

girlhood and Maggie's great temptation. It is perfectly true that it may be the same in real life [...] But the course of human things is not necessarily the pattern for a work of art.'[38] And similarly, as Edward Bulwer-Lytton puts it:

> It may be quite natural that she [Maggie] should take that liking to him [Stephen], but it is a position at variance with all that had before been heroic about her. The *indulgence* of such a sentiment for the affianced of a friend under whose roof she was, was a treachery and a meanness according to the Ethics of Art, and nothing can afterwards lift the character into the same hold on us. The refusal to marry Stephen fails to do so.
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> This brings me to another view of a fault in the same direction. In studying plot or incident, this very remarkable writer does not enough weigh what is Agreeable or Disagreeable. Now the Disagreeable should be carefully avoided. You may have the painful, the terrible, the horrible, even; but the *disagreeable* should be shunned.[39]

As we can observe here, a virtually identical criticism against *Mill* is found in these two independent reviews of the novel. A third similar view comes from Dinah Mulock Craik who questions the intention behind the novel's 'picturesque piteousness which somehow confuses one's sense of right and wrong'.[40] This seems to suggest the popular reaction to Eliot's second novel to be a somewhat disappointing one, and that her readers' regret lies mainly in two areas. Firstly, Eliot has clearly upset her readers' sense of morality by engaging Maggie in her 'great temptation', which according to the popular mid-nineteenth century

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[38] *The Guardian*, 25 April 1860, pp. 377-378.
[39] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 'Letter to John Blackwood', National Library of Scotland, MS 6118.
[40] Dinah Mulock Craik, *MacMillan's Magazine*, 3 (1861), 441-448 (p. 444).

middle-class belief of duty, is clearly a violation of both her character and her supposed feminine duty as the angel and guardian of the morality in the Victorian home (a subject which I will go into more detail in the next chapter). Secondly, and more importantly, Eliot is perceived to have deliberately misled her readers into believing in the 'heroic' Maggie; that after winning the readers' love and sympathies for her, she quickly abuses this by placing Maggie in a 'disagreeable' situation, a turn of events that her reviewers evidently felt very strongly about (which brought out Bulwer-Lytton's point about an author's 'duty' to present only elements that are 'agreeable'). But while her critics were acute in deciphering the nature of this second 'offence', they were less so in realising that this was exactly what Eliot had hoped to achieve in her novel. In a letter to John Blackwood, for instance, she defiantly acknowledged that 'I cannot of course agree with the writer [of one of the above reviews] in his regrets; if I could have done so, I should not have written the book I did write, but quite another.'[41] This letter shows that Eliot had written *Mill* with a precise purpose in her mind, and that although her critics may have found that purpose distasteful, Eliot remained firm in her determination to depict the conflict between what she perceives as true morality and society's popular conceptualisation of it according to the middle-class code of duty. Given Eliot's own personal background with regards to her relationship with G. H. Lewes, she would indeed have understood better than anyone that passing superficial judgements on anyone, according to society's conventional faith in 'duty', is a relatively easy task. The ability to decipher the significance of this middle-class code of duty, however, and to examine its justification in regard to what is true social morality, would only have been possible if the situation was

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[41] George Eliot, 'Letter to John Blackwood, 30 March 1861', in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), III, p. 394.

looked at and judged from both sides, instead of being dismissed at the earliest opportunity according to popular faith in the Arnoldian principle of 'duty'. Thus, by intentionally drawing her readers at first to the 'good nature' of Maggie and successfully obtaining their sympathies, what Eliot was able to accomplish was to 'force' her readers into making an observation and judgement that is unprejudiced by their adopted middle-class sense of duty, and to use their understanding of Maggie as a good natured and moralistic character to counter their otherwise instinctive dismissal of the scenario according to the conventional middle-class moralistic ideology of duty. As Eliot herself proclaimed in the novel, 'the great problem of shifting relation between *passion* and *duty* is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it', and that the struggle between 'passion' and 'duty', indeed, is a scenario for which 'we have no master key that will fit all cases'.[42]

In this sense, the dilemma of the novel represents a continual social struggle between one's 'passion' and sense of 'duty'. Eliot implores her readers to utilise their senses to judge whether an individual has indeed 'fallen below the possibility of a renunciation',[43] instead of simply refering back to their 'master key' of the middle-class sense of duty. Despite Bulwer-Lytton and other reviewers' strong objection to the novel and her role as a novelist, Eliot was nonetheless able to get her message across and make a number of her readers reconsider their sense of morality in relation to the popular social judgement which was compelled by their middle-class ideology regarding duty. E. S. Dallas, for instance, wrote in *The Times* in 1860 that:

> The general influence of the book was to reconcile us to human nature, to make us

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[42] Eliot, *Mill*, p. 497. My italics.
[43] Ibid.

> think better of our fellow men, to make us feel that in the weakest there is something to be admired, in the worst something to be loved [...] and so to give us not only the temporary delight of listening to a pleasant tale, but also the permanent good of an increased sympathy with our kind.[44]

The true nature of the struggle, indeed, is one in which Eliot perceives human nature to be barricaded and buried by society's obsession with their middle-class values. Thus, the recognition of the importance of 'human nature', as recognised by readers such as Dallas, is a crucial first step towards the de-mythologisation of Victorian cultural identity as an extension of un-indicative middle-class ideologies. Aside from Eliot,[45] during the late 1850s, this Victorian convention of paying blind devotion to duty was also criticised heavily by other thinkers, such as George Meredith. In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), for instance, the conventional Victorian sense of duty was portrayed by Meredith, in a satirical tone, to be a ghost of a bygone era that needs to be exorcised. The novel's allusion to duty is made explicit in its satirical description of the 'system' imposed by Sir Austin on his son. The father's comment about the son reflects an idea similar to the Victorians' interpretation of duty, which aims to suppress one's individuality in order to conform to a conventional code of behaviour and achieve a conventional sense of identity. For example, the father states that:

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[44] E. S. Dallas, 'The Mill on the Floss', *The Times*, 19 May 1860, p. 11.

[45] Aside from *Mill*, the dilemma of Victorian cultural identity as manifested in the institutional form of 'duty', is actually a theme that is shared by many of Eliot's works, in particular *Romola* (1862), *Middlemarch* (1871), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). However, due to the confinement of time and space, I am only able to include only *Mill* in my study, chosen for its publication year of 1860 which coincides with the greater contemporary preoccupation of the reconfiguration of Victorian duty, a year after the publication of *Self-help*. This makes *Mill* representative in not only being the first work by Eliot to consider duty as an institutional form, but also in its manifestation as a timely response to this emerging social attitude which is the main focus of this thesis.

I would have him guiltless of the impulse to gainsay my wishes: feeling me in him stronger than his undeveloped nature, up to a certain period, where my responsibility ends and his commences. Man is a self-acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine; but, though self-acting, he may lose the powers of self-guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition. Young, he is an organism ripening to the set of mechanic diurnal round, and while so he needs all the Angels to hold watch over him that he grow straight, and healthy, and fit for what machinal duties he may have to perform…'[46]

Sir Austen's system is based on his mentality of seeing men as machines that are susceptible to rigid conformity, which is used by Meredith to illustrate his perception of the problem of the Victorian sense of duty, in its negligence of an individual's sense of humanity. Meredith's point is a virtually identical one to Eliot's in the sense that both see the powerlessness of the individual to escape from the confinement of the situation as the tragedy of the age. Richard Feverel, who is constantly referred to as the 'systematized youth' in the novel, clearly and painfully feels this sense of suppression as he longs to break free from the confinement of the system. When his father is absent, for instance, the sense of joy expressed by Richard is one that originates directly from his liberated individuality; he feels he has finally within his grasp 'the rich untested world, and the great Realm of Mystery, from which he was now restrained no longer' (123). This, in essence, is the equivalent of what Maggie and Philip have always yearned for but are denied in the end by their sense of duty. Although, unlike them, Richard does manage to fulfil an individual desire in marrying Lucy (via open

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[46] George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, ed. Edward Mendelson (1859; London, Penguin, 1998), p. 139. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

rebellion against the system), the story nonetheless ends in tragedy because of his own inability to release himself, psychologically, from the confinement of the system, which prompts him to rush off to fight the duel which no one around him, in particular Lucy, considers necessary, in the belief that he is performing an important 'duty'. Richard, therefore, despite what he has with Lucy, has never truly been able to escape from the system because in the end he still judges himself heavily by it.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, during the 1850s and 60s, although the public is no doubt aware of the reconfiguration of conventional duty as demonstrated in their reading taste, most do not necessarily connect it with the greater question of cultural identity, and simply treat the issue as a case of one traditional social value being challenged by another. While there are a few occasions in which conservative minds denounce the attitude of self-help as endangering the morality of the British consciousness, it is really Eliot and Meredith who are among the earliest Victorians to recognise the cultural significance of this 'new attitude' to Victorian cultural identity, and demonstrate this connection in their respective works. Interestingly, both showed a clear preference for the reconfiguration of conventional duty in their demonstration of the undesirable aspect of it. This suggests to me a more receptive response towards the reconfiguration of duty as an institutional form (compared to religion), and as we will see in Chapter 5, it is crucial to the eventual reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity as a whole. For the time being, however, we will concentrate on the cultural significance of the discourse by Eliot and Meredith on conventional duty, which is obvious because, despite their critique of their age's devotion to the notion of duty, both authors seem to agree that the conventional sense of middle-class duty, by itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. They simply

wish to caution the public against being blindly possessed by it. In *Mill* and *Richard Feverel*, Tom Tulliver and Sir Austen respectively reflect this attitude that appreciates yet cautions against conventional duty. Despite their unforgiving attitude, both, at times, can appear surprisingly loving and generous which makes readers sympathise and detest them at the same time. Tom's love for Maggie as reflected in the pain he feels when he believes Maggie to have behaved dishonourably towards her cousin is something that is constant and unchanged throughout *Mill*. Both Maggie and the readers realise and appreciate this. Similarly, when Sir Austen returns to find Richard married to Lucy, he tries to act in a manner which he firmly believes (however misguidedly) will lead to forgiveness and reconciliation, and only fails to achieve this because his blind sense of devotion to the system has misled him from the beginning. It is clear, therefore, that the criticism from Eliot and Meredith is not one that is directed at the belief in the virtues of middle-class duty, but at the contemporary attitude of equating it to cultural identity and neglecting the more important nature of human freethinking. Meredith, for instance, does not have a problem with Sir Austen's aim of using his system to cultivate 'virtuous young men' (118). He does, however, disapprove of Sir Austen's obstinate wish to retain the system for the sake of retaining the system, especially after the realisation that Richard has a will of his own and wants to find his own way, when he proclaims 'So dies the system!' (307). From the above observation, it seems clear that, during this time, thinkers like Eliot and Meredith saw a problem with the conventional notion of duty in Victorian society, and wished to rectify that by asking readers to weigh their traditional interpretation of it against the questions of humanity and free-thinking.

Although both the preachings of Samuel Smiles and the novels of Eliot and Meredith can be seen as forces that, either intentionally or unintentionally, stand

to contradict the traditional middle-class attitude regarding duty and Victorian cultural identity during the 1860s, their natures, however, are of different sorts and should not be confused, despite the fact that they both ended up working towards the same common goal. In the Smilesian principle of self-help, what we are able to observe is a system of thought that asks society to reconfigure its traditional values into something that can better represent the industrial age. The attitude of self-improvement and opportunity seeking became popular because it achieved exactly that. This, however, does not mean that the destabilisation of social duty which resulted from *Self-help* was purely an accident, because, although it may not have been the intention of Smiles to displace social duty, its manifestation was nevertheless a direct consequence of the perceived incompatibility between the conventional institutional form of duty and contemporary society. Eliot and Meredith simply took up this observation and acted upon it by pointing out the actual discrepancy between traditional duty and the new world. Although they did not question the morality of this Arnoldian code of duty, they did ask their readers to reconsider the popular rationale behind equating this principle to their notion of cultural identity. David Malcolm's reading of Tom Tulliver as a Smilesian hero, therefore, is flawed in the sense that it does not register the different motives behind the writing of *Self-help* and *Mill*. Smiles was able to gain success and popularity because contemporary readers perceived the principle of *Self-help* to be something that would enable them to depose an old system and achieve success in the industrial age. Tom, however, represents the opposite of this because his morality reflects the desire to find a compromise between the old duty and modernity, instead of the complete overhaul of one in favour of the other. Thus, to claim that Tom is the embodiment of Eliot's criticism on *Self-help*, and that 'her condemnation of Tom's irresponsible individualism is part of her attack

throughout her writing on our egoisms, social and individual',[47] is missing the point because Eliot herself even claimed that 'I have certainly fulfilled my intention very badly if I have made the Dodson honesty appear "mean and uninteresting" [because] Tom is painted with as much love and pity as Maggie'.[48]

Situating works such as *Self-help*, *Mill*, and *Richard Feverel* in their historical context, my reading of these text is that, instead of endorsing or contradicting one another, they reflect the process of reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. Such an interpretation is made possible by examining how they reflect the problem experienced by social duty as an institutional form from 1850 to 1870, in the sense that the dissimilar approaches of Smiles, Eliot, and Meredith actually illustrate the fact that conventional duty was perceived as a cultural concern in the first place. Although like the problem with religion, works and criticisms which appeared during this period regarding duty reveal a certain level of interest in trying to restore this conventional institutional form (or at least to find compatibility between the concept of self-help and social duty), most of their tones ring of desperation more than anything else. Novelists such as Eliot and Meredith wished to balance this problem by pointing out that the constraint imposed on the individual is due to the existence of a conventional idea of duty, but, unlike Smiles who vicariously expounded the abandonment of traditional social duty, Eliot and Meredith regarded traditional duty as something that could benefit the individual, and emphasise the importance of the individual's rationality. What they proposed can therefore be regarded as a redefinition of 'duty', from its traditional sense that casts rigid moral judgment on individuals to a new form of duty that is more flexible and evaluates the goodness (or badness) of a person

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[47] David Malcolm, '*The Mill on the Floss* and the Contemporary Social Values: Tom Tulliver and Samuel Smiles', in *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, 26 (1987), 37-45 (p. 42).

[48] Eliot, *Letters*, III, p. 299.

according to circumstances. It is in this sense that Smiles, Eliot, and Meredith contributed to the debate regarding the reconfiguration of the Arnoldian institutional form of duty.

3. DOMESTICITY

In the previous chapters, we have seen how public anxiety over the institutional forms of religion and duty leads to uncertainties over the conventional middle-class definition of Victorian cultural identity. What I now want to deal with in this chapter is the sense of anxiety and doubt over the concept of Victorian cultural identity, in relation to the conventional middle-class ideal of domesticity during the 1850s.

I. Cultural Anxiety and the Victorian Ideal of Domesticity

As I shall demonstrate, the Victorian discourse on domesticity is in part dependent on the notions of religion and duty, and relies on the fact that the three of them intersect to formulate ideas such as morality and social principles. While the concept of family, or the domestic domain, is undoubtedly an important idea within the overall scheme of Victorian society, the way in which this concept influences cultural identity as an institutional form is observable in the fact that the qualities that were emphasised by the Victorian domestic ideal as positive and respectable are manifestly identical to the virtues that were widely regarded as essential to their presupposed image of cultural identity. For example, one of the most common ideas generated from the Arnoldian concept of domesticity is the perception of it as a moralistic stronghold which guards and cultivates the values and virtues that are traditionally 'Victorian'. Thomas Arnold famously alludes to

the notion of home as the place where 'the very idea of family was invested'.[1] This implies the fact that he views the concept of domesticity as a place where the idea of family (which, in the Arnoldian middle-class context, is synonymous with harmony and morality), is cultivated. After Arnold and his middle-class revolution of the English public school system, this idea of home being a place which denotes goodness and morality continues to find support from those like John Ruskin, who, in an often-cited passage, sees home as:

> [A] place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in.[2]

The image of home that Ruskin presents here is a typically middle-class one, in the sense that the importance of the virtuous ideals that are attached to the concept is stressed. These ideas are virtually identical to the moralistic image which Victorian cultural identity identifies itself with. Indeed, domesticity is often imagined as a shelter with its function being to shield its inhabitants not only from undesirable elements such as 'terror, doubt, and division', but also to maintain morality by protecting them from 'the unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world'. This is a notion that is also present in the popular image of Queen Victoria herself. As Deirdre David points out, throughout Victoria's reign, she was

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[1] Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *Life of Thomas Arnold, D. D.* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1910), p. 129.

[2] John Ruskin, *Of Queens' Gardens* (London: George Allen, 1902), pp. 21-22.

commonly portrayed by her subjects as 'the great Britannic mother, ruling with maternal severity and sympathy her own eminently respectable large family, her own British subjects, and her own subjugated natives.'[3] The idea of domesticity, therefore, is undoubtedly important to the Victorians because of the implication of and emphasis on morality.

But while this belief in domesticity as a place where morality is embedded is by no means new, an abrupt and almost unnatural emphasis on it would emerge after the 1850s, which suggests a sense of urgency in trying to reinforce this conventional middle-class idea in what was an atmosphere of growing doubt. An indication of this can be seen in the large number of 'family' periodicals that suddenly appeared during this period. Magazines such as *London Journal* (1845-1912), *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849-1854), *Household Words* (1850-1859), and *Family Economist* (1848-1860)[4] represent exemplary publications which endorse a similar marketing strategy in advocating themselves as provider of 'such practical suggestions as shall contribute to the health and happiness of the family',[5] or 'the moral, physical, and domestic improvement of the industrious classes'.[6] Obviously, the common goal that unites these magazines is their desire to instil and promote the conventionally moralistic ideal of domesticity in their contemporary setting. But the rapidity with which these periodicals suddenly emerged, and their blatant efforts in emphasising the idea of morality in a domestic setting, also highlighted the uncertainty of the time that their 'messages' are perceived to be necessary. This prompted 'moralists' to unhesitatingly publish

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[3] Deirdre David, *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 6.

[4] According to Catherine Waters, the *Waterloo Directory of Victorian Periodicals* has close to 40 entries that include the term 'family' in their title. For details, see *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 16-17.

[5] 'Our First Words to Mothers', *The Mother's Friend*, 1 (1848), 1-2 (p. 2).

[6] Title page of the *Family Economist*, 1 (1848).

them, and mistresses to hurry to buy them in order to maintain the moralistic presence in their households. These kinds of publication, as Margaret Beetham has shown, are immensely popular with middle-class married women.[7] One such article, for instance, even blatantly states that it is 'really the Home which governs the world, for it is there that those principles of conduct and action are imbibed which men afterwards carry with them into active life'.[8] This suggests that, to the Victorians, the relationship between the moralistic image of domesticity and the moralistic appearance of their cultural identity is already a recognised fact, for as the article implies, without the cultivation of such values in a domestic setting, it would not have been possible for its moralistic ideal to be carried into the world by *men*, hence the conventional moralistic atmosphere of the English domesticity must be guarded at all cost.[9] Furthermore, aside from the blatant moralistic preaching found within the pages of such magazines, the fact that they appeared so quickly during this span of time but dwindled almost as quickly during the end of the decade, also implies there must have been a widespread perception of the need for such magazines to appear and preach their middle-class domestic principles, in order for them to attract the investment of the middle-class in the first place.

After the 1850s, doubt from society towards the middle-class moralistic ideal of domesticity would begin to emerge. An early sign of this can be detected in the figure of the Victorian orphan which, since the 1840s, was becoming an increasingly common literary theme. As Laura Peters points out, the theme of the

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[7] See Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[8] 'Home Power', *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 2 (1849), 129-131 (p. 129).

[9] For more information on how the concept of home mirrors the Victorian ideal as 'the highest form of social organization', see Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (ed.), *Household and Family in Past Time: Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group Over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America, with Further Materials from Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

orphan is seen as a threat to the domestic ideal because it suggests the 'family and all it came to represent – legitimacy, race and national belonging – was in crisis', and exposes the fact that 'it was at best an unsustainable ideal.'[10] Indeed, during the 1850s, congruent with ongoing religious doubts and moral criticism in relation to the notion of duty, the traditional portrayal of the middle-class myth of the moralistic existence of the Victorian family began to show signs of stress and deterioration. Consider the reputation of Charles Dickens regarding the idea of domesticity. Although throughout his career he was constantly praised by reviewers for 'his sympathy with the affections of the hearth and the home' that 'knows no bounds',[11] if one reads Dickens carefully, this family-friendly image of his is actually debatable because the worlds of Dickens's novels have often as much to do with a broken and dysfunctional home as a happy one. In *Great Expectations* (1860), for example, although Wemmick's allusion to home as 'his castle' apparently echoes the concept of regarding domesticity as a moralistic stronghold (which his drastically different behaviour inside and outside his home, described by Pip as 'twin Wemmicks',[12] shows), it is important to remember that Wemmick's castle, as Monica F. Cohen suggests, represents only an 'ideal space' that 'will ultimately elude Pip.'[13] It is a feeling of alienation from the traditional home that is also prominent in others of Dickens's novels. The title of *Bleak House* (1853), for instance, is already significant in its implication of irony towards the concept of Victorian domesticity.[14] Furthermore, if one were to

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[10] Laura Peters, *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 1.

[11] A. W. Ward, 'Charles Dickens: a lecture, 30 November 1870'. Quoted in Philip Collins (ed.), *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971), p.539.

[12] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectation*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (1861; London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 384.

[13] Monica F. Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 79.

[14] For more information on the reinterpretation of domesticity in *Bleak House*, see Kevin

compare his portrayal of the orphan from the earlier *Oliver Twist* (1837) to Jo from the post-1850 *Bleak House*, one would realise that despite Oliver's misfortune, home still represents a space of delight for him in which 'ladies and gentlemen who were in passions of anguish during the ceremony of interment, recovered almost as soon as they reached *home*, and became quite composed before the tea-drinking was over. All this was very pleasant and improving to see; and Oliver beheld it with great admiration'.[15] By contrast, Jo not only finds any association between the concepts of happiness and home completely incomprehensible, but cannot even afford the little time to comprehend it, as:

> [He] moves on, through the long vacation, down to Blackfriars Bridge, where he finds a baking stony corner, wherein to settle to his repast.
>
> And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. There he sits, the sun going down, the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams---everything moving on to some purpose and to one end---until he is stirred up, and told to "move on" too.[16]

The progressive disillusionment of Dickens in regard to the concept of home is obvious in his description of London, where the description of 'a red and

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McLaughlin, 'Losing One's Place: Displacement and Domesticity in Dickens's *Bleak House*', *MLN*, 108 (1993), 875-890.

[15] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Andrew Lang (1837; London: Chapman & Hall, 1897), p. 49. My Italics.

[16] Dickens, *Bleak House*, pp. 270-271.

violet-tinted cloud of smoke' represents an allusion to the modern industrial world. The traditional importance of home as a symbol of stability and simplicity is portrayed as a lost ideal and is no longer identifiable in 'the great, confused city'. Jo's wandering, in this sense, seems to imply the sense of forlornness and alienation of modern society in relation to its conventional domestic values.[17]

Aside from Dickens, the notion of home as a representation of both desire and disillusionment is also found in the works of other popular novels during the 1850s. In *Villette* (1853), for example, the ideal home that is once within Lucy Snowe's grasp is forever denied her, as she struggles and ultimately resigns to a life in 'conditions of denial and privation.'[18] Likewise, in *North and South* (1855), Margaret Hale's inability to describe her home to Lennox – 'I can't describe my home. It is home, and I can't put its charm into words'[19] – also suggests domesticity to be an elusive ideal that in the end is unrealisable. Thus, in works such as *Villette* and *North and South*, we see a pattern that suggests a sense of uncertainty about the conventional ideal of domesticity, giving the implication that society no longer believes home and morality to have a straightforward connection. Instead, domesticity in the 1850s has become something of a Camelot-like myth, in the sense that while the concept remains as admirable and virtuous as ever, it at the same time feels alien and the public is beginning to question whether the association between home and morality is as simple as it once seemed.

During the middle of the century, as a result of society's uncertainty about their domestic ideal, there were strenuous efforts to restore the image of home as a

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[17] For more on the theme of domesticity in *Bleak House*, see McLaughlin, 'Losing One's Place' and F. S. Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London: The Athlone Press, 1979).

[18] Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten, intro. Margaret Smith (1853; London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 453.

[19] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 14.

morally justified and attainable goal. As discussed earlier, domestic periodicals tried to advocate exactly this type of ideology. In contemporary novels such as Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), H. F. Chorley's *Roccabella* (1859), and Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Noble Life* (1866), the idea of a virtuous and moralistic home is also very much a deliberate part of their plots. As June Sturrock suggests, 'Yonge's work represents a kind of apotheosis of the domestic novel, both in the explicit claims made for the important role played by novels and romances in moral education, and in that she consistently represents domesticity as the sphere for moral action'.[20] The fact that these authors were all women probably suggests that there was a connection between their sex and the ideal of domesticity (a point I will develop later). But while these kinds of domestic novels were undoubtedly very popular during their day, whether the moral principles preached in these pages actually reached the public at all is somewhat questionable. In *Household Words* (a domestic magazine), for instance, there is an anecdote about a young lady who reads only the 'morally beneficial' domestic novels. But instead of praising her, the writer actually expressed contempt for such practice:

> A young and charming lady, previously an excellent customer at the circulating libraries, read this fatal domestic novel on its first appearance some years ago, and has read nothing ever since. As soon as she gets to the end of the book, this interesting and unfortunate creature turns back to the first page, and begins it again.[21]

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[20] June Sturrock, *"Heaven and Home": Charlotte M. Yonge's Domestic Fiction and the Victorian Debate over Women* (Victoria, B. C.: University of Victoria Press, 1995), p. 98.

[21] 'Doctor Dulcamara, M. P.', 18 Dec, 1858. See Dickens, Charles, *Uncollected Writings from Household Words 1850-59*, ed. Harry Stone (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1969), II, p. 622.

According to Harry Stone, this article is a collaborative project between Dickens and Collins, both of whom are prominent figures in the mid-century debate regarding the relationship between the middle-class domestic ideal and Victorian cultural identity. Regardless of the truth of the report, the satirical tone of the writer, in itself, is already evidence enough to show that the monolithic cultural perception of the moral goodness of conventional domesticity is no longer an issue to be taken seriously by the public. Indeed, with the rise of sensation novels (most of which were serialised in popular family magazines)[22] and the ready acceptance of the genre by the reading public, the traditional foothold enjoyed by the middle-class ideal of domesticity on cultural identity does seem to be on slippery ground during the 1850s. In contrast to the domestic novels of Yonge and others, sensation novels, a fully-fledged subgenre of popular fiction by the early 1860s, often intentionally associate the concept of domesticity to elements which its conventional middle-class interpretation is supposed to guard against. Not only did the idea of home as being in harmony with morality completely vanish in sensation novels, but, in its place, there were plenty of suggestions of the possibility of misdeeds and felonies happening in domestic surroundings.

One must remember that prior to the 1860s, the depictions of the domestic world in novels, despite the portrayal of them as elusive and unrealisable, are nevertheless associated with the concept of peace and happiness and represent an ideal that is identifiable with a moralistic sanctuary. In the few exceptions such as *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and the gothic novels, the settings of the houses in question are often placed in perceivably exotic places like Italy or, very rarely,

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[22] See Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrace, 2001).

Scotland, which represent places that would have a far lesser impact on the concept of domesticity than an English setting.[23] Even in *Bleak House*, although the symbolic similarity between Chesney Wold and the corruption of the Court of Chancery is clear, in that '[b]oth the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage',[24] the connection, however, is never a direct one and when Lady Dedlock falls from grace, she is metaphorically made to flee from her moralistic home which she is never to enter again. Thus, despite the feeling of uncertainty regarding the attainment of such ideals in the contemporary world, the moralistic image of home in Dickens was never rejected (and in Esther's case it was even realisable). But in sensation novels, the criticism of a moralistic home was taken a stage further, in that not only was the conventional ideal of domesticity presented as a concept that is unrealisable, but its virtue was actually openly questioned by the writers. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, for instance, in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) states that:

> We hear every day of murders committed in the country. Brutal and treacherous murders; slow, protracted agonies from poisons administered by some kindred hand; sudden and violent deaths by cruel blows, inflicted with a stake cut from some spreading oak, whose very shadow promised – peace. In the county of which I write, I have been shown a meadow in which, on a quiet summer Sunday evening, a young farmer murdered the girl who had loved and trusted him; and yet, even now, with the stain of that foul deed upon it, the aspect of the spot is – peace. No crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven Dials that has not been also done in the face of that sweet rustic calm which still, in spite of all,

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[23] See my earlier argument on Englishness vs. Scottishness and their relationship within the structure of Victorian identity.

[24] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 8.

we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning, and associate with – peace.[25]

In this highly critical passage, the irony is clearly directed at the public who are reluctant to acknowledge and accept the fact that immorality exists in their society, as well as their predilection to accept only *peace* on the surface. Later on, she states in an even more deliberate and open criticism that:

Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs; terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes, and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done. I do not believe in mandrake, or in blood-stains that no time can efface. I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty.[26]

Thus, by identifying the domestic with 'an atmosphere of crime', Braddon has given her strongest and most direct implication to her readers, of the plausibility of outer beauty disguising an inner wickedness. Furthermore, when we read this in the context of domesticity as an institutional form, we realise a direct relationship between Braddon's criticism of domesticity, and her view regarding society's interpretation of cultural identity. By casting doubts on the moralistic image of the English domestic scene, Braddon's statement turns literally into an application of the corruptibility of the notion of moralistic Victorian cultural identity. In fact, if we move further and look at the entire genre of sensation fiction, we will see that the images of a corrupted home, frequently presented in sensation novels, suggest

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[25] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. David Skilton (1862; London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 54.
[26] Ibid., pp. 140-141.

strongly a unity between good and evil, so that the outer glory of the country-houses and the commitment of terrible crimes are married into one. This is a parallel criticism to what Dickens, Gaskell, and Brontë were doing earlier in their portrayal of the modern world as having forsaken its traditional domestic (moralistic) values. Sensation novels simply took it a step further to imply immorality to be actually within us, rather than just surrounding us. This view is supported by critics such as Winifred Hughes and Lyn Pykett, who suggest that sensation novels in the 60s all share a common theme in deliberately moving away from the concept of the innocent home, in order to portray domesticity as an accomplice of immoral activities that covers up all sorts of unspeakable crimes.[27] Indeed, whether it was *The Woman in White* (1860), *East Lynne* (1861), *Aurora Floyd* (1863), *Armadale* (1866), or *The Moonstone* (1868), the plot of these novels all centre upon the theme of a terrible crime hidden in the midst of an ordinary domestic setting. This, in a sense, exposes a genuine interest in sensation novels in reflecting the possibility of immorality existing within a presumably innocent English identity. As U. C. Knoepflmacher argues, in sensation novels there is 'collision between a lawful order in which identities are fixed and an anarchic lawlessness in which these social identities can be erased and destroyed.'[28] In a time when the moralistic nature of Victorian cultural identity was being questioned (in parallel anxieties regarding religion and duty), the emergence of the sensation novels no doubt displays a clear sense of disapproval, or at least questioning reserve, towards the contemporary view of identity, which

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[27] For example, see Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From The Woman in White to The Moonstone* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994).

[28] U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'The Counterworld of Victorian Fiction and *The Woman in White*', in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 351-369 (p. 362).

also reflects the general anxiety of the time as the mid-Victorians struggled to cope with their ego and the revelation of their immoral side.

But during the 1860s, as we have already seen in the quotation by Ruskin which opened this chapter, a number of conservative minds saw in this growing literary trend a threat to their conventional notion of cultural identity, and responded accordingly by criticising the portrayal of immorality within a domestic setting. Given the parallel situations of simultaneous doubts towards religion and duty, this is understandable because as the 1860s approached, conventional Victorian cultural identity, which hinges on the sense of middle-class morality as dictated by its institutional forms, was already losing ground. The attack on morality within domestic houses by sensation novelists, thus, would have been perceived as a major obstacle to the revitalisation of Victorian cultural identity by conservatives who were reluctant to consider the possibility of immorality within their world. As a result, despite the genre's success with the public, criticism, mostly accusing sensation novels of spreading indecency and immorality, swamped the periodicals of the day. Aside from Ruskin, H. F. Chorley, another conventionalist, famously attacked the phenomenon of sensation novels in 1866 by calling it a 'diseased invention'.[29] He further accuses the genre for introducing an 'imperfect and confused morality' to the reading public, and states that:

> [T]he worst should be made to appear the better cause, or that it should be represented as possible that certain qualities of mind or temper are sufficient to bring a character safely through all kinds of actual and positive wrongdoing

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[29] H. F. Chorley, 'unsigned review', *Athenaeum*, 2 June 1866, 732-733. Quoted in Norman Page (ed.), *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 147.

> without fatal or even serious damage.[30]

However, it should be noted that much like the efforts of Arnold and Ruskin in their (re)definition of Englishness (which I will discuss at length in Chapter 5), accusations that sensation novels were an unwholesome influence on the moral well-being of the public, once again reveal a sense of insecurity towards the conventional Victorian definition of their identity. Uncomfortable feelings were felt towards the sensational imagery that portrayed Englishness as capable of consisting of elements such as murder, adultery, and theft, which represent the very opposite of their traditional concept of a moralistic existence. W. Fraser Rae, for example, responded furiously to a novel of Braddon's because he perceived the sole aim of it was to:

> [P]ersuade people that in almost every one of the well-ordered houses of their neighbours there was a skeleton shut up in some cupboard; that their comfortable and easy-looking neighbour had in his breast a secret story which he was always going about trying to conceal.[31]

And similarly, an article titled 'Our Novels. The Sensational School' made the complaint that:

> It is on our domestic hearths that we are taught to look for the incredible. A mystery sleeps in our cradles; fearful errors lurk in our nuptial couches; fiends sit down with us at table; our innocent-looking garden walks hold the secret of

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[30] 'Novels', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 44 (1863), 168-183 (p. 170).
[31] W. Fraser Rae, 'Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon', *North British Review*, 43 (1865), 180-204 (p. 203).

> treacherous murders; and our servants take £20 a year from us for the sake of having us at their mercy.[32]

These, among other criticisms, tend to confirm the perception of the existence of such 'faults' in sensation novels, in that they are immoral because of their violation of the meritorious ideal associated with the middle-class ideal of domesticity, which threatens to de-authenticate the very identity of the culture of Englishness. The connection between a moralistic home and conventional middle-class Victorian cultural identity was certainly still of enough significance at this time for sensation novels to be resented by the moralists.

But is the accusation of sensation novelists as trouble-makers who seek simply to introduce chaos to an otherwise peaceful household for the mere sake of stirring up sensation, as contemporary criticism seems to suggest, justified? As numerous modern studies of the genre have shown,[33] inspirations for the majority of such novels actually did not come from the imaginations of the novelists, but were adaptations of reports of criminal activities and the sensation journalism that flourished during the 1860s and 70s. John Sutherland and Sandra Kemp, for instance, have both persuasively illustrated Wilkie Collins's usage of contemporary criminal reports in his plots.[34] As for the lesser-known sensation novelists, Jeanne Fahnestock offers the example of the famous Yelverton trial of

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[32] 'Our Novels. The Sensational School', *Temple Bar*, 29 (1870), 410-424 (p. 422).

[33] While critics such as Brantlinger, Hughes, and Pykett have all written about the relationship between sensation novels and contemporary crimes in their respective works, for an excellent study that focuses specifically on this area, I recommend Richard D. Altick, *Deadly Encounters: Two Victorian Sensations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986). See Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is Sensational about the Sensation Novel?', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 37 (1982), 1-28; Hughes, *Maniac*, Pykett, *Sensation Novel*; as well as Walter M. Kendrick, 'The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 32 (1977), 18-35.

[34] See John Sutherland's footnotes to *Armadale* (1866; London: Penguin, 1995) and the introduction to *The Moonstone* by Sandra Kemp (1868; London: Penguin, 1998).

1861 which has given inspiration to no fewer than six sensation novels between 1861-1867.[35] The fact that a demonstrable relationship exists between reality and sensation novels, however, matters little to the critics of the genre because in their mind, their society was still as moralistic as it was superior. In regard to sensation journalism, as far as the critics were concerned, they were simply there to be ignored. In reality, affairs of adultery and bigamy were so common that, between 1860-1864, no fewer than three books were published to try to solidify the concept of marriage in England and the law that governs which.[36] Indeed, one contemporary reviewer lamented that 'It may be long, but the time must come at last, when a thorough reconsideration of the principles which should govern the relations of the sexes will be necessitated'.[37] However, it seems that the critics of sensation novels were all surprising ignorant of this state of affairs, and hence did not rise to condemn the issue until it found its way into the plots of sensation fictions, at which point they quickly denounced the novelists for daring to invent and spread immoral thoughts in their otherwise 'moralistic' society. No wonder when Charles Reade was accused by critics of introducing vulgar and distasteful subjects into his novels, he protested his innocence to the editor of the *Times* that he had merely 'dramatized' the facts reported everyday by the *Times*.[38] Thus,

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[35] The list of novels inspired directly by this particular trial, according to Jeanne Fahnestock, consists of: Theresa Yelverton's *Martyrs to Circumstance* (1861); J. R. O'Flanagan's *Secret Marriage* (1861); Cyrus Redding's *A Wife and not a Wife* (1867); Caroline Norton's *Lost and Saved* (1863); Amelia B. Edwards's *Barbara's History* (1864); and Margaret Oliphant's *Madonna Mary* (1866). Of these authors, Theresa Yelverton was actually the original prosecutor in the trial. See 'Bigamy: The Rise and Fall of a Convention', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 36 (1981), 47-71 (p. 52-53).

[36] They are: John Fraser Macqueen, *A Practical Treatise on the Law of Marriage, Divorce, and Legitimacy, as Administered in the Divorce Court and the House of Lords* (London: V. & R. Stevens & Sons, 1860); James Muirhead, *Notes on the Marriage Laws of England, Scotland, and Ireland, with Suggestions for their Amendment and Assimilation* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1862); and Alfred Waddilove, *The Laws of Marriage, and the Laws of Divorce, of England, as Established by Statute and Common Law, arranged in the Form of a Code for Popular Use* (London: Longman, 1864).

[37] 'The Laws of Marriage and Divorce', *Westminster Review*, 82 (1864), 442-469 (p. 469).

[38] Quoted by Brantlinger in 'Sensational', p. 10.

while on one hand, sensation novels were really nothing more than exaggerations of an already disclosed reality, on the other hand, they were eyed with suspicious because they brought to the public's attention the immoral characteristics of the culture which most were trying hard to ignore.

To a sharp-witted reader such as Henry James, though, the fact that the 'dark' elements, which sensation novels were infamous for associating themselves with, came from society and not the 'twisted' imagination of the authors, is obvious. He believes that although sensation novelists 'betray an intimate acquaintance with that disorderly half of society which becomes every day a greater object of interest to the orderly half', the genre, nonetheless, is innocent because it simply 'interprets the illegitimate world to the legitimate world.' Thus, reading sensation novels, to James, would be no different than reading about 'Modern England – the England of to-day's newspaper.'[39] Unfortunately, the moralists at the time did not, and could not, share this perspective. For them, the genre was perceived as a corruption and threat to the virtuous nature of Englishness which many people still hoped to uphold and preserve. This, coming at a time when the social criticism of Mayhew and doubts concerning religion – both considered fundamental to the makeup of the traditional concept of cultural identity – were gaining strength, only made the urgency to revive and protect Englishness in its conventional definition more desperate. An example of these feelings, of the relentless endorsement of virtuous Englishness in the traditional sense, can be perceived in an 1863 unsigned review in the *Reader*, which accuses the sensation novels of being 'a plant of foreign growth. It comes to us from France, and it can

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[39] Henry James, 'Miss Elizabeth Braddon', in *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature – American Writers, English Writers* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 741-746 (p. 745 & 744). Article originally appeared in *Nation*, 9 (1865).

only be imported in a mutilated condition.'[40] And likewise, in an earlier review in 1861, the creation of the genre was similarly attributed to 'the candid or reckless vulgarity of the Americans.'[41] During this period of time, one should remember that foreign, and especially French literature was generally perceived to be a highly immoral and therefore inappropriate influence on the English taste (more on this in Chapter 4); therefore, by comparing sensation novels to foreign literature, two things were actually happening. Firstly, it shows unwillingness of mid-nineteenth century English society to acknowledge the existence of immorality within their culture, in that denial was aimed not only at the depictions of the immoral affairs in sensation novels, but also at the very existence of the genre itself. Secondly, such attitude also confirm the feeling of vulnerability that certain members of society were experiencing at the time, that when the slightest hint of immorality was sensed, an excuse must immediately be found for its emergence on the moralistic English soil. In this case, fingers were being pointed at the evilness of the non-English, hence immoral, others.

From this battle between the sensation novel and its critics, we observe the Victorian cultural dilemma in relation to domesticity. We began this chapter by demonstrating the intricate relationship between Victorian cultural identity and domesticity as an institutional form. But as we have seen, during the 1850s when questions began to emerge regarding the home's conventional role as a moralistic stronghold, Victorian cultural identity suffered as a result. I will now further strengthen this argument by examining a crucial extension of the concept of domesticity in 'the Angel in the House' debate during the period.

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[40] 'unsigned review', *Reader*, 3 January 1863, 14-15. Quoted in Page, p. 134-35.
[41] 'Sensation Literature', *Literary Budget*, 1 (1861), 15-16 (p. 15).

II. The Angel in the House

As Walter E. Houghton points out: 'At the center of Victorian life was the family.'[42] Indeed, in Victorian society, the virtuous and moralistic ideals that were associated with the concept of family are of unprecedented importance. Not only does the concept of family dictate society's reaction and taste towards certain things, but via its association with notions of morality and principle, it also defines the identity of their culture. Within this context of Victorian domesticity, one of the most crucial elements is the role expected of women in regard to the middle-class interpretation of morality. As Martha Vicinus points out:

> The Cornerstone of Victorian society was the family; the perfect lady's sole function was marriage and procreation (the two, needless to say, were considered as one). All her education was to bring out her "natural" submission to authority and innate maternal instincts. Young ladies were trained to have no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man's taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity.[43]

The association between the role of women and family is that women are generally perceived as the regulators of the household, who oversees and maintains the daily functioning of the house, and procreate and raise the family, thus providing it with a sense of warmth that is essential to the nineteenth century ideal of domesticity. The fundamental belief in 'Man for the field and woman for

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[42] Houghton, p. 341.
[43] Martha Vicinus, introduction to *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (London: Methuen, 1980), p. x.

the hearth',[44] for instance, is a good reflection of this mentality which demands absolute confinement of the identity of the female sex in a domestic sphere. In *The Mill on the Floss*, while Maggie Tulliver's father recognises and takes pride in the fact that his daughter shows a superior intellect at a young age that is complemented by her thirst for knowledge, he at the same time laments this very intelligence:

> And you should hear her read – straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand. And allays at her book! But its bad – it's bad [...] a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt.[45]

Maggie's father is indeed correct in his assessment that, during the mid-nineteenth century, a woman's being skilled for the 'field' rather than the 'hearth' could only mean disaster. In the nineteenth century, a woman's identity is prescribed to them according to their sex, thus to deny this as Maggie did would signify the rejection of her Englishness. As Yvonne M. Ward argues, this concept of men and women belonging to separate spheres within society is such a strict and rigid ideal that not even Queen Victoria is exempted from it; for when she married Albert, she had made a secret promise to herself that she would do her best 'to establish Albert unequivocally as the head of the family and the household'.[46]

Because the image of Victorian women is incorporated so tightly into the idea of domesticity, a natural result of this is that the moralistic middle-class ideals that were so influential to the concept of home, also became inseparably

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[44] Alfred Tennyson, 'The Princess', V. 437.
[45] Eliot, *Mill*, p. 17.
[46] Yvonne M. Ward, 'The Womanly Garb of Queen Victoria's Early Motherhood, 1840-42', *Women's History Review*, 8 (1999), 277-294 (p. 281).

associated with women. This attitude in turn made the contemporary social expectation towards women a revered one, and prompted women to be judged much more severely than men according to society's perception of their 'morality' and 'decency'. The phenomenon of 'woman-worship', which reached its height during the 1850s, is a direct result of this. During this period of time, women were not only admired for their beauty, but more importantly, they were esteemed for their perceived moral purity. While this kind of discourse on the phenomenon of woman-worship is no doubt familiar to many readers, by switching our focus from that of a specific 'woman question' to an opened cultural dilemma, we realise this has important implications for the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, which is simultaneously taking place. For instance, in the idealistic image of woman that is most famously hailed by Coventry Patmore in *The Angel in the House* (1854),[47] the notion of morality which is shared by Victorian cultural identity and femininity as a common foundation, is serenaded as follows:

Her disposition is devout,

Her countenance angelical;

The best things that the best believe

Are in her face so kindly writ

The faithless, seeing her, conceive

Not only heaven, but hope of it.[48]

Indeed, *The Angel in the House* is an important poem not only because it is described by Ruskin as 'the sweetest analysis we possess of quiet modern

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[47] The complete poem, however, did not appear until 1862.
[48] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, I. 4. The Rose of the World. 11-16.

domestic feeling',[49] which shows the contemporary awareness of the connection between femininity and domesticity, but also because it contains meanings that can help us to further decipher the relationship between domesticity and cultural identity. As we have previously discussed, the association between morality and domesticity lies in their perceived interconnection to Arnoldian ideologies such as morality and sweetness. 'Woman-worship', in being an extension of domesticity which emphasises this sense of the moralistic value placed upon women, essentially functions by projecting onto Victorian women this ideal of morality, hence confining their freedom and individuality. The 'Angel in the House' phenomenon is a direct manifestation of this idea. Indeed, within the traditional Victorian cultural identity as laid out by Thomas Arnold, exemplary notions of 'virtuous' women restricted to a domestic role are abundant. This image of women was helpful to the conventionalists, for the purpose of confirming Victorian cultural identity as a long-standing and legitimate representation of the British cultural heritage, thus strengthening its position in an age of uncertainty. As Walter Houghton notes:

> In Shakespeare and Scott, in Dante and Homer, women are "infallibly faithful and wise counsellors"; and by their virtue and wisdom men are redeemed from weakness or vice. Then, with their role defined, he [man] proceeds at once to his description of the home, since it is women so conceived who make it a temple and a school of virtue.[50]

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[49] Ruskin, *Works*, XV, p. 227.

[50] Houghton, p. 350. This is a notion that ties in well with my earlier reading of *The Mill on the Floss*, in terms of Maggie's submissiveness (which reminds one of *The Taming of the Shrew*) and its significance to the Victorian notion of duty (see my previous chapter).

Although strictly speaking, of the four cultural icons mentioned only Shakespeare and Scott are capable of claiming a British heritage, Houghton's summary is still sufficiently representative of the nineteenth century. This is because Victorian cultural identity, during its formative period, is mainly relied on to distinguish itself against foreign cultural presence. Thus as colonisation approached its peak during the century, the definition of foreignness shifted towards a more and more Eastern perspective, which as a result led to the tendency to look to the entire West (instead of just the British Isles) for cultural association. Matthew Arnold, for example, famously draws upon characteristics of Hellenism and Hebraism in describing his ideal Victorian identity. Similarly, Houghton points out that the distinctive characteristics found in the female characters of Dante and Homer are also used by the Victorians to emphasis what they perceive as crucial qualities in their cultural identity. And by emphasising and prolonging this traditional practise of feminine submission, the claim of Victorian identity as a continuation of a glorified past (which should immediately imply a sense of virtue and morality) is furthermore legitimised. Ruskin's effort in the late 1870s to revive the conventional middle-class Victorian identity, in his deliberate utilisation of a distinctly middle-class interpretation of the themes in Shakespeare, Scott, and Austen (which were appropriately termed 'English national fictions' by Raphael Samuel)[51] is obvious. In the same lecture quoted earlier, for instance, he goes on from the issue of domesticity to make the following statement regarding women:

> Such, in broad light, is Shakespeare's testimony to the position and character of women in human life. He represents them as infallibly faithful and wise

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[51] See Raphael Samuel's introduction to *Patriotism – The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Vol. III: National Fictions*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. xi-xxxvi.

> counsellors, – incorruptibly just and pure examples – strong always to sanctify even when they cannot save.[52]

It is clear that what Ruskin is doing is to deliberately forge a connection between his reading of Shakespeare and his perceived notion of domesticity, in order to make the claim that the role of women should be (as it had always been) restricted to their domestic functions. During the mid-nineteenth century, interests were indeed high in the encouragement of women to submit to their roles as a moralistic symbol for domestic harmony. Charles Kingsley's idea of a Christian's responsibility to rescue fallen women is an example of how the mid-Victorians were anxious to equate women with domesticity and morality. The purpose of such a rescue is to 'ennoble and purify the *womanhood* of these poor woman; to make them better daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers',[53] which fits in nicely with the Arnoldian view of a woman's socially prescribed roles. Manuals such as Sara Ellis's *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (1843), Alexis Soyer's *Modern Housewife or Ménagère* (1849), or Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861), many written by women for women, all became bestsellers via their unanimous effort to advise women to tamely perform their 'duties' and act submissively. This type of conscious advocacy for women to conform to their conventional image is present also in the domestic magazines of the time. As an article from one of such publications indicates:

> [W]oman's power is for rule, not for battle, – and her intellect is not for invention

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[52] Ruskin, *Queens*, p. 8.

[53] Charles Kingsley, 'The Country Parish', in *Lectures to Lladies on Practical Subjects* (Cambridge: MacMillan, 1855), pp. 53-66 (p. 57).

or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. [...] England is in a peculiar and especial manner *the land of home* – that no men exert themselves either so strenuously or so successfully to promote the comfort of their home in so far as providing for the inmates of the home is concerned; [...] without which [...] there can be no domestic comfort, and by necessary consequence no national greatness.[54]

The connections between the role of women and home, and between home and the nation are depicted clearly in this passage, in its assertion of the widely perceived view of women having the ultimate power in dictating the morality of a home, and home being indicative as a reflection of the glory of England. Therefore, having women fastened to such an 'angelic' image not only lends strength to the idea of the moralistic home, but also legitimises moralistic Victorian cultural identity. This is evidently so because aside from the articles found in popular magazines and journals of the time, support for the spirit of woman-worship can also be seen plentifully in the popular literature of the time. Besides Tennyson's endorsement for this attitude in 'The Princess' (1847),[55] the contrasting personalities of morality and immorality between Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1848), the appraisal of the modesty and dignity of the heroines of *Shirley* (1849), and the celebration of the eventual triumph of feminine virtue over superficiality in *Mary Barton* (1848), can all be seen as examples of praises directed at the traditional image of femininity which would be familiar to the reading public of the mid-Victorian generation. This ideal of femininity is also fiercely supported by

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[54] 'Woman in Domestic Life', *Magazine of Domestic Economy*, 1 (1836), 65-68 (p. 66).

[55] For an analysis of Tennyson's view regarding 'woman-worship', see John Killham, *Tennyson and The Princess: Reflections of an Age* (London: The Athlone Press, 1958); as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of this particular poem in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (NewYork: Columbia University Press, 1985).

John Ruskin. Going back to his famous lecture, although he begins by rejecting the notion of the inferiority of women in being 'the shadow and attendant image of her lord, owing him a thoughtless and servile obedience,' he had a motive in mind for doing so, which is revealed in his endorsement that a woman's 'great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation.' [56] Assertions as such not only stress the importance of the middle-class the feminine ideal in association with domesticity (her office), but also offer a clear indication of the popular perception of a woman's role in relation to the domestic settings of the time. However, during the mid-nineteenth century, there were also plenty of opposing views. T. H. Huxley, for instance, protested openly against 'the new woman-worship which so many sentimentalists and some philosophers are desirous of setting up.'[57] And Bella's declaration, in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), of wanting 'to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house',[58] likewise reflects discontent with this feminine convention. The timing of such a statement is significant because Bella's attitude is a stark contrast to that of the pre-1850 Ruth Pinch, who feels 'Housekeeping' is one of the 'elevated responsibilities of all sorts and kinds'. The author even declares that 'No doll's-house ever yielded greater delight to its young mistress, than little Ruth derived from her glorious dominion over the triangular parlour and the two small bed-rooms'.[59] Such differences between Ruth and Bella are significant because

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[56] See Ruskin, *Queens'*, p. 4/21. In the appendix of this lecture, high praise was also given by Ruskin to Coventry Patmore, claiming that 'you cannot read him too often or too carefully; as far as I know he is the only living poet who always strengthens and purifies; the others sometimes darken, and nearly always depress and discourage, the imagination they deeply seize.' (p. 57).

[57] Thomas H. Huxley, 'Emancipation – Black and White', in *Collected Essays, vol. III: Science and Education* (London: MacMillan, 1893), pp. 66-75 (pp. 68-69).

[58] Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 679.

[59] Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. Patricia Ingham (1844; London: Penguin, 1999), p.

they suggests a dramatic change in society's perception of woman, and the timing of which supports my thesis of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity from 1850-70. George Meredith, in 'Modern Love' (1862), also made his view clear towards this traditional image prescribed to woman by stating that:

> I cannot take the woman at her worth!
>
> Where is the ancient wealth wherewith I clothed
>
> Our human nakedness, and could endow
>
> With spiritual splendour a white brow
>
> That else had grinned at me the fact I loathed!
>
> A kiss is but a kiss now! and no wave
>
> Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.[60]

In this poem, because of a situation with a failed marriage (which in itself presents, already, a nonconforming thought towards the idea of domestic harmony), the poet's ability to regard women in the orthodox angelic light, and his ability to 'take the woman at her worth', is deemed impossible. Represented by Meredith here is an important change of direction in the mentality of the Victorians towards their preconceived notion of Englishness, in that the question posed by the poem regarding women and the ideals they traditionally embody must also be regarded as threatening to the moralistic appeal of domesticity that, by the same token, reflects the essence of Victorian cultural identity. Thus the question of femininity cannot simply be looked at on an isolated level, but must be incorporated into the greater problem of anxiety over Englishness at the time. The overall effect is that

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[60] George Meredith, 'Modern Love', XXIX. 8-14.

it forces, together with the question of religion and the revelation of social problems, the Victorian public to rethink and re-conceptualise their concept of identity in relation to the truth of the presupposed moralistic essence in the image of Englishness.

In popular sensation novels, like the unorthodox depiction of the domestic world commonly found in the genre, the characterisation of femininity is sometimes also presented in a highly unconventional perspective. Instead of being the angelic presence in the domestic world, women are often portrayed in the exactly opposite manner in that they become the cause of havoc and miseries to what was once a peaceful household. As Lyn Pykett points out, 'at the centre of all sensation novels,' there 'is a woman with a secret, or several women with secrets.'[61] This metaphorical relationship between the ideas of 'secret' and Victorian women is a potentially dangerous one, because within the conventional structure of domestic identity, the implication of 'secret' is often associated with corruption and immorality, elements that certainly do not fit into the composition of the moralistic identity which is supposedly reflected by the phenomenon of woman-worship. Indeed, the nature of the secrets harboured by heroines of the sensation novels, such as Aurora Floyd, Lady Audley, Isabel Carlyle, and Lydia Gwilt, is often that of an adulterous and immoral affair which as a result is open to dangerous interpretation. One contemporary critic, for example, describes it as 'the flames of vice as a purifying fiery ordeal, through which the penitent is to come elevated and sublimed.'[62] As Cannon Schmitt suggests:

Although sensation fiction was extremely popular with the reading public,

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[61] Pykett, p. 17.
[62] 'Sensation Novels', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 41 (1862), 564-584 (p. 567).

reviewers judged its assault upon the generic conventions of Victorian realist narrative to be a threat to stable gender roles and, by extension, to English nationality itself. [...] in a discourse of nationality, it becomes apparent that by representing in their pages an assault upon cherished national icons, in particular the Englishwoman and the home, they worked to undermine a stable sense of English national identity.[63]

The portrayal of rebellious and non-submissive women in sensation novels can be perceived as a threat to the orthodox Victorian identity, because if unorthodox female characters are read as critiques of the suppression of women, then by the same token it would have to be understood as an act that attempts to undermine the structure of nineteenth century Englishness in which the moralistic middle-class concept of domesticity (which hinges on the conventional perception of femininity) is a feature.

Besides supplementing the virtuous notion of domesticity, the confined role of women is also of crucial importance to the Victorian identity in terms of the structure of the male and female sexual hierarchy. This is a concept that is perhaps best reflected in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, generally regarded as the piece of work that began the trend and popularisation of sensation novel. As Lyn Pykett argues:

> One of the reasons that the woman in white presents a challenge to Walter's identity is that her appearance challenges and blurs the gender categories upon which masculine identity was constructed. Walter's divided response to the woman

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[63] Cannon Schmitt, *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 115.

is indicative of the contradictions of her appearance. Walter initially responds as a chivalrous gentleman to those aspects of her appearance which signify respectable, middle-class femininity: self-control, vulnerability, guardedness, 'loneliness and helplessness'. Having helped her to avoid recapture, he is racked with guilt that he has let loose that uncaged femininity that it is the duty of every respectable man to control.[64]

The sexual tension and identity crisis in *The Woman in White* is powerfully demonstrated here in Walter and Anne's very first meeting, when Walter is struck by her uncharacteristic and inexplicable appearance which does not conform to the conventional image of the angel in the house. Consequently, he begins to experience difficulties in locating her femininity, which results in an identity crisis of his own. He notes:

> There was nothing wild, nothing immodest in her manner: it was quiet and self-controlled, a little melancholy and a little touched by suspicion; not exactly the manner of a lady, and, at the same time, not the manner of a woman in the humblest rank of life. [...] What sort of a woman she was, and how she came to be out alone in the high-road, an hour after midnight, I altogether failed to guess.[65]

This makes him feel uneasy as:

> [T]his woman, whose name, whose character, whose story, whose objects in life, whose very presence by my side, at that moment, were fathomless mysteries to me.

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[64] Pykett, p. 18.

[65] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (1860; London: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 20-21. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

It was like a dream.

Eventually a sense of insecurity and uncertainty towards his own being is invoked, and he asks:

> Was I Walter Hartright? Was this the well-known, uneventful road, where holiday people strolled on Sundays? Had I really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally domestic atmosphere of my mother's cottage? (23)

In her analysis of *Woman in White*, Pykett uses this example to illustrate the sense of male insecurity regarding his own sexual position in relation to the whole Victorian domestic hierarchy. However, by applying Pykett's argument to the greater context of Victorian cultural identity, we see how this cultural formula between male and female social roles can impact the overall conceptualisation of how Victorians define themselves as well. For instance, in the above quotation when Walter first encountered Anne, he is shocked to realise that his own identity is threatened as he fails to recognise Anne as a woman, since she does not fit the mould conventionally prescribed to a nineteenth-century woman. The failure to recognise Anne's sex not only upsets the boundary between the male and the female, but also endangers his notion of cultural identity because, following his failure to recall his masculinity, he begins to wonder whether he is still 'Walter Hartright', which puts his entire being and identity into question. By following our argument throughout the chapter of the relationship between domesticity, sexuality, and Victorian cultural identity, we can see that Walter's identity crisis is a direct manifestation of the disruption of middle-class sexual hierarchy, in the sense that a woman's inability (or unwillingness) to act according to her

prescribed 'Angel in the House' image, disrupts both male and female identities. It happens because the concept of domesticity, during the nineteenth century, is regarded as one of the prerequisites of cultural identity in which a clear distinction between the two sexes must be present in order to allow men and women to fulfil their specific roles that ultimately makes up their conception of a family. Because Walter tries and fails to locate in Anne a recognisable assurance of domestic womanhood to which he can relate, his own identity suddenly crumbles as he is unable to identify in her a reference point for his own sexual identity.

In the relationship between Walter and Marian Halcombe, it is also possible to detect a similar notion of this structure of identity based on femininity and the confusion it leads to when it is not offered. When Walter first sees Marian, he describes her as someone having 'a large, firm, *masculine* mouth and jaw', with an expression 'altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability', and he is 'repelled by the *masculine* form and *masculine* look of the features'.[66] In other words, it is masculine traits that Walter detects in Marian instead of feminine ones. Because he fails once again to locate in Marian the familiar signs of femininity, in her presence, Walter's designated male role as the protector of the domestic female noticeably diminishes. Not only does he lose his place in the sexual hierarchy by accepting his position as 'a harmless domestic animal' among 'beautiful and captivating women,' thus essentially becoming a dependent rather than a protector; but furthermore, the 'guardian experience' which defines him and gives him his identity, actually 'parted' from him as if he 'had never possessed it' (64). The element of uncertainty over Marian's sexuality, thus, reduces Walter's ability to associate himself with his proper social identity. Towards the end of the novel, however, when Laura's mind is feeble and Marian

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[66] Ibid., p. 32. My Italics.

has to stay home to take care of her, by confining herself to the domestic setting, Marian's gendered role symbolically shifts from a masculine one to a feminine one. This gives Walter the opportunity to recognise her as 'too genuine a woman' (458). From this point on, Walter's identity is regained as he frees himself from domestic responsibilities to become, once more, the protector and the man who roams the outside world. In a scene near the end of the novel, the following exchange between Walter and Marian gives a clear indication of the roles of the two (in terms of male and female relationship), which places them back in their conventional sexual identities:

> 'Not alone! Oh, Walter, for God's sake not alone! Let me go with you. Don't refuse me because I'm only a woman. I must go! I will go! I'll wait outside in the cab!'
>
> It was my turn to hold her. She tried to break away from me, and get down first to the door.
>
> 'If you want to help me,' I said, 'stop here, and sleep in my wife's room to-night. Only to let me go away, with my mind easy about Laura, and I answer for everything else. Come, Marian, give me a kiss, and show that you have the courage to wait till I come back.' (597-98)

As D. A. Miller suggests, 'Male security in *The Woman in White* seems always to depend on female claustration.'[67] Indeed, the cases of confinement of femininity in *The Woman in White*, which includes Laura and Anne's physical confinement to the asylum by Sir Percival, Madame Fosco's psychological confinement by the

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[67] D. A. Miller, '*Cage aux Folles*: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*', in *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 95-124 (p. 108).

Count, and even Marian's symbolical confinement in her sexual role by Walter, all seem, unsurprisingly, to be beneficial to the identity of their male confiner. Just as Walter thrives on his male role following Marian's confinement in the house, Sir Percival similarly is able to legitimise his own social identity by imprisoning Laura and Anne in an asylum. This once again is a demonstration of the vulnerability of the conventional structure of Englishness based on a set of false and imposed sexual identifications. But there is more. As Marian protests:

> Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace – they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship – they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return? Let me go, Laura – I'm mad when I think of it! (183).

This outburst is perhaps Wilkie Collins's most direct attack on the sense of Victorian identity as based on sexual constraints. Whether it is the confinement of female figures by villainous males in *The Woman in White*, or the portrayal of rebellious females in the genre in general, in both cases, a sense of disillusionment towards the identification of cultural identity based on this kind of feminine imprisonment can be detected. Furthermore, it reflects an urge to re-examine the concept of conventional identity which requires faith in a series of preconceived but no longer functional middle-class values, such as religion, domesticity, and femininity. As Schmitt observes of sensation novels: 'in a discourse of nationality, it becomes apparent that by representing in their pages [...] an assault upon cherished national icons, in particular the Englishwoman and the home, they worked to undermine the hold of conventional middle-class ideals on the notion of

Victorian cultural identity'.[68]

III. Female Emancipation by the Female Poets

Alongside this emerging tendency of criticism towards middle-class domestic and feminine imposition, the rise of the 'rebellious' woman during the same era represents an important aspect of the reconfiguration of cultural identity, as it disrupts the conventional code of middle-class sexual hierarchy which the notion of domesticity relies on in order to function as an institutional form. Having just finished our discussion on the importance of sensation novels in the reinterpretation of this issue, we now turn our attention to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, whose feminine perspective on the confinement of Victorian women to a middle-class domestic setting is epitomised in their respective poetical works *Aurora Leigh* (1857) and 'Goblin Market' (1862).

The purpose of the following reading of *Aurora Leigh* is to show how the poem can be interpreted as an important critique regarding women's struggle to free themselves from the prescribed image of the 'angel' in order to become individuals. Although it represents a significant aspect of the poem, it has not received much literary attention in recent years. Glennis Stephenson, for example, interprets the love theme of *Aurora Leigh* as a continuation of 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' (1850), and did not conceive of it as the poet's perspective on the question of sexuality and identity.[69] Angela Leighton, despite recognising Browning's commitment to 'the general cause of women's emancipation and

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[68] Schmitt, p. 115.
[69] See Glennis Stephenson, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Poetry of Love* (London: UMI, 1989).

independence',[70] chooses to explore it as a subconscious response from the poet to her longing for a father-figure, and reads it as a 'hopeful political message of independence and equality for women upon a hidden last quest for the father',[71] and does not consider its contemporary cultural significance. However, in order to fully understand the cultural implication of the relationship between the concepts of moralistic women, domesticity, and cultural identity, which Browning was undoubtedly aware of as a dominating cultural dilemma at the time, it is crucial to be able to decipher the poet's message regarding sexuality in this important work. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning's own admission, *Aurora Leigh* is composed with an unmistakable motif of 'comprehending the aspect and manners of modern life',[72] which can be translated into the poet's own personal response to the sentiment of 'woman-worship' that very much represents the 'aspect and manners' of the 1850s. The fact that Browning is not only acutely aware, but critical, of the feminine debate of the time is evident. For example, in a letter which coincides with the composition of *Aurora Leigh*, Browning recorded the following reaction after reading Tennyson's 'The Princess':

> What woman will tell the great poet that Mary Wollstonecraft herself never dreamt of setting up collegiate states, proctor-dom & the rest... which is a worn-out plaything in the hands of one sex already, & need not be transferred in order to be proved ridiculous?[73]

As stated earlier in this chapter, the endorsement of 'woman-worship' during the

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[70] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Sussex: Harvester, 1986), p. 115.
[71] Ibid., p. 116.
[72] Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Frederic G. Kenyon (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1898), I, p. 204.
[73] Ibid., I, p. 427.

1850s and 60s had prompted numerous reactions from society both for and against it. The resentful attitude expressed by Browning in the above quotation towards the issues raised by 'The Princess', thus, gives us an idea of where she stands in this debate; and as this thesis will go on to show, it is a stance that is echoed throughout the story of *Aurora Leigh* as well. For example, Aurora's rejection of her wealthy cousin's marriage proposal, as well as her rescue of the 'immoral' Marian who is raped and then gives birth to an illegitimate child, both demonstrated clearly a desire on Barrett Browning's behalf to renounce the middle-class ideal of femininity as well as the contemporary belief in 'woman-worship', which binds women to the convention of marriage, and imposes on them an image of rigid 'purity'. Interestingly as well, while Browning never made any secret of her looking for inspiration for *Aurora Leigh* from her favourite female novelists, the works which had had the strongest influence on her were Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1807), George Sand's *Consuelo* (1843), and to a lesser extent Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*;[74] works that had acquired a somewhat notorious reputation among the middle-class. The author that perhaps best exemplify the so-called Victorian middle-class moral – Jane Austen – however, is never even once considered by the poet to be one of Aurora Leigh's prototypes. Browning feels that:

> Conventional Life is not the Inward Life [...] and a writer who is not one-sided, must comprehend *both* in his view of humanity. Jane Austen is one-sided – and her side is the interior & darkest side. God, Nature, the Soul [...] what does she say, or

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[74] For more information on 'Aurora Leigh' being inspired by contemporary novels, see Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1978), and Patricia Thomson, *George Sand and the Victorians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

suggest of these?[75]

By accusing Austen of being 'one-sided' in her representation of the world, Browning is essentially pointing out here the quintessence of *Aurora Leigh*, which is to interpret the world away from the conventional, middle-class ideology-dominated perspective, and reject its Arnoldian wisdom in the process. Aurora's actions throughout the poem, indeed, are testaments to this wish, particularly regarding the middle-class views on Victorian femininity and domesticity. Throughout the poem, Aurora is scrupulously consistent in her defiance against being moulded into an 'angel in the house'. As a teenager, she resents and shows contempt for the middle-class ideals of domesticity and femininity which her aunt, who 'liked a woman to be womanly' and believes that 'English women, she thanked God and sighed / Were models to the universe',[76] had tried to instil in her. The important issue, however, is the realisation that it is not so much her aunt's personality that Aurora finds unbearable, but rather, it is the atmosphere of contemporary England, along with its middle-class mentality regarding the 'role' and social definition of women, that Aurora feels suffocated under, as:

'The Italian Child,

For all her blue eyes and her quiet ways,

Thrives ill in England: she is paler yet

Than when we came the last time; she will die.' (II. 495-498)

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[75] Elizabeth Browning, *Letters*, II, p. 238.

[76] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, I, 443-444 & 446. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

As has been stated already, while modern critics are quite often able to grasp the feminist motif that consistently runs through the poem, they often fail to point out the cultural significance of it. The focal point of Aurora's rebellion against the Victorian middle-class suppression of women lies with the heroine's rejection of her wealthy and idealistic cousin's marriage proposal. The reason for this is not that she does not love him, but that Aurora absolutely refuses to have her destiny dictated by others, especially after her love for him is recognised by her aunt, who confronts her niece with the following words:

> You love this man. I've watched you when he came,
>
> And when he went, and when we've talked of him: (II. 688-89)

To which, Aurora replies:

> I blushed.
>
> I feel the brand upon my forehead now
>
> Strike hot, sear deep (II. 697-99)

Thus, Aurora's rejection of Romney, and in part her own happiness, can largely be attributed to her refusal to be associated with the conventional Victorian image of womanhood, as a union with the wealthy Romney would certainly win her approval from her aunt (with her Arnoldian middle-class perspective), and make her the ideal 'angel in the house' in the eyes of the contemporary English society. Ironically, it is in her refutation of Romney and a certain happiness, that Aurora is able to liberate herself from the middle-class prejudice towards her sex which Romney himself is incapable of transcending:

Well, girls have curious minds,

And fain would know the end of everything

[…]

While you sing

Your happy pastorals of the meads and trees,

Bethink you that I go to impress and prove

On stifled brains and deafened ears […] (II. 1114-1115, 1200-1203)

Romney's attitude here is obviously an echo of the tone of Ruskin, Tennyson, and others who, during this time, advocated heavily the ideal of 'Man for the field and woman for the hearth', which Elizabeth Barrett Browning, as shown in her objection to 'The Princess' quoted earlier, clearly sees to be the root of the problem of Victorian sexual inequality. By rejecting Romney, thus, Aurora may forsake a part of her happiness, but what she gains is a sense of freedom and independence known to so very few Victorian women under the suppression of middle-class domestic ideologies. This, in turn, enables her to leap and be freed from being 'ankle-deep in English grass' (I. 1139), which signifies the English middle-class suppression, and win her freedom.

Aside from Aurora's personality, the Italian backdrop to the poem is also significant in reminding readers of the poet's contempt for the conventional Victorian association of women with morality and domesticity. Aurora's father, who is 'an austere Englishman', (I, 65) learns about love and the value of feminine freedom when he is in Italy. Aurora's memory of him becomes her strongest source of support throughout her story. Furthermore, as if to deliberately distinguish Aurora from her English surroundings, Aurora's Italian heritage is

constantly referred to throughout the poem; and in the end, it is to Italy that Aurora would return, along with the 'fallen' Marian, as if to signify the complete rejection of the English middle-class mentality on the issues of femininity and morality.

Aurora Leigh is an important poem of Victorian female emancipation because, through the actions of its main character, it consistently rejects the conventional middle-class tradition of defining women according to a prescribed set of social ideologies. Although the ending of the poem in which Aurora finally accepts Romney can provide a potentially conflicting message in her acceptance of the role of the wife, whose aim is 'As God made women / to save men by love', (VII. 184-85) its message, in fact, confirms rather than contradicts the poem's feminist connotation. The masterstroke from Browning comes in the end of the poem when Aurora marries Romney. Like Rochester from *Jane Eyre*, Romney, at this point, is both blind and financially ruined; thus the poem contradicts the middle-class ideal of domesticity by supporting a marriage in which the man (the protector) is both physically and financially inferior to the woman (the dependent). Browning herself declares that:

> What has given most offence in the book, more than the story of Marian – far more! – has been the reference to the condition of women in our cities, which a woman oughtn't to refer to, by any manner of means, says the conventional tradition. Now I have thought deeply otherwise. If a woman ignores these wrongs, then may women as a sex continue to suffer them; there is no help for any of us.[77]

From the poet's alluded parallel between 'conventional tradition' and the 'wrongs'

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[77] Elizabeth Browning, 'To Julia Martin, Feb 1857', in *Letters*, II, p. 254.

of society which causes women to suffer, we realise the true nature of *Aurora Leigh* as intended by the poet, which is the longing for liberty from the traditional confinement of the feminine identity by the 'conventional tradition' of woman-worship. It is a statement that is not lost on contemporary readers. In *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, for instance, one critic was quick to make the complaint that the heroine of *Aurora Leigh* had been 'made to resemble too closely some of the female portraits of the French novelist'.[78] This signifies not so much the obviousness of Browning being influenced by the likes of George Sand, but that the anti-middle-class sentimentality in *Aurora Leigh* regarding women's social sphere, which 'French novels' were notorious for at the time, was evident to its readers. Coventry Patmore, in the meantime, contributed to this view by arguing that 'the chief misfortune for the poem is [...] that "conventions," which are society's unwritten laws, are condemned in too sweeping and unexamining a style'.[79] To this, Barrett Browning simply answered calmly:

> I hear he [Patmore] is to review in the North British my poor 'Aurora Leigh', who has the unfeminine impropriety to express her opinion on various "abstract subjects", – which Mr. Patmore can't abide.[80]

While the difference of opinions between Patmore and Barrett Browning is probably to be expected, the important issue here lies in the fact that despite Patmore's obvious objection to the poem, he nonetheless recognises, without any

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[78] W. E. Aytoun, 'Mrs. Barrett Browning – Aurora Leigh', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 81 (1857), 23-41 (p. 33).

[79] Coventry Patmore, 'Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *North British Review*, 26 (1857), 443-462 (p. 450).

[80] 'To Isa Blagden, Oct 1856'. Quoted in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (London: Norton, 1996), p. 335.

doubt, the essence of *Aurora Leigh* which is a representation of an open rebellion against something that is far more significant than sexual equality – that of the 'conventions' of Englishness which indicate not only society's unwritten laws, but also of the quality and characteristics of its cultural identity, which such laws inevitably reflection.

My reading of *Aurora Leigh* has demonstrated the cultural significance of the poem in relation to questions such as identity, femininity, and conventional middle-class value regarding morality and domesticity. We shall now proceed to examine the interpretation of this same theme in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'. Ever since its publication, 'Goblin Market' had been termed and hailed by critics for being many different things – from a text about hidden feminine sexual desire to a Marxist critique on capitalism.[81] But like *Aurora Leigh*, the heart of the poem is very much a feminist assessment of the Victorian woman question, particularly in relation to the conventional middle-class ideal that designates women to certain roles and functions in society, which Rossetti criticises as a hindrance to a woman's maturity and liberty. The plot of 'Goblin Market' is simple enough. It tells the story of two sisters and their encounter with a band of malevolent, fruit-selling goblins. At first, readers may be tempted into reading the poem as a conventional fairytale that depicts the struggle between the innocent and the corrupted, there is, however, one important detail that distinguishes Rossetti's tale from a simple and conventional children's story, and that is the fact that the goblins are referred to in the poem as distinctly male (terms such as 'goblin men' and 'goblin brothers' appear consistently throughout the poem). This, along with the fact that the only characters to appear in the poem are

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[81] For examples, see Helena Michie, 'There is no Friend like a Sister: Sisterhood as Sexual Difference', *ELH*, 56 (1989), 401-421 and Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', *ELH*, 58 (1991), 903-933.

the goblins and the sisters, hint at the fact that the poem contains not only the theme of good versus evil, but also male versus female. As a number of critics have pointed out, the two sisters motif in 'Goblin Market' is a strong recurrent pattern in many of Christina Rossetti's poems.[82] What distinguishes Lizzie and Laura from their predecessors, however, is their inseparable resemblance to each other, which Rossetti describes as:

> Golden head by golden head,
> Like two pigeons in one next
> Folded in each other's wings,
> They lay down in their curtained bed:
> Like two blossoms on one stem,
> Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
> Like two wands of ivory
> Tipped with gold for awful kings.[83]

Unfortunately, the sisters' peaceful lives are put into complete discordance when Laura is enticed into the men's world by one of their fruits. Represented in this plot is the poet's observation that maidens, upon leaving their nursery (childhood) to enter the world of men (via marriage), are suppressed immediately by society's expectation concerning femininity and domesticity. The fact that Laura gains her fruit by offering the goblin men a lock of her hair lends further strength to this argument, because in the Victorian context, hair signifies love and the

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[82] For example, see Antony H. Harrison, *Christina Rossett in Context* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Katherine J. Mayberry, *Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Discovery* (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

[83] Christina Rossetti, 'Goblin Market', 184-191. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

psychological bonding of male and female. In other words the exchange of fruit and hair represents a Victorian woman's entrance into the domestic sphere as designated by the Victorian middle-class ideology. The separation between Lizzie and Laura, therefore, turns into one of childhood innocence which is able to remain unchanged, versus that of adulthood in a male-dominating world in which the woman's true self is suppressed in favour of the goblin-esque middle-class values.

In *Affairs of the Hearth: Victorian Poetry and Domestic Narrative*, Rod Edmond makes an interesting observation on the similarities between Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and 'Goblin Market'. He points out that, aside from the obvious parallel between the corruption of Laura and the resistance of Lizzie, and the characters and ordeals of Elinor and Marianne, the two works also share an uncanny connection in their plots.[84] Willoughby, for instance, is able to corrupt Marianne by taking from her a lock of hair, just as the goblin men have done to Laura. Even more striking, however, is the fact that both works feature a character named Jeannie who is respectively corrupted by the evil of the goblins and Willoughby. Without other information, it is hard to speculate whether the similarities between the two works are purely coincidental or a carefully staged and manoeuvred move by Rossetti; nonetheless, it is worth noting that in Austen's world, while Willoughby undoubtedly symbolises the presence of evil, his sexuality was not made a significant factor by Austen since the novel does feature other men and many of whom are helpful rather than harmful. In 'Goblin Market', however, Rossetti seems predetermined to make the sharp distinction between good and evil by separating them into the sexual categories of male and female.

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[84] See Rod Edmond, *Affairs of the Hearth: Victorian Poetry and Domestic Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1988)

Without exception, men are evil, and women are pure and innocent and are susceptible to their corruption. If Rossetti had indeed been thinking of Jane Austen when she wrote 'Goblin Market', then my suggested reading of the poem would have had an added twist. Knowing the symbolical importance of Jane Austen's novels to the Victorian middle-class ideology, it would seem Rossetti was interested in developing Austen's idea a stage further, by suggesting the origin of disruption to feminine life to have been caused not necessarily by one man, but men as a collective sex.

Although I have no means of proving Rossetti's intention with regards to Jane Austen and its representation of the middle-class ideals, what really matters is that the blatant message contained in the poem criticises male domination over females within the social sphere, as represented by Laura's contamination by the 'male' world once she leaves her childhood innocence and enters maidenhood by giving away a lock of her hair (the poet did not use the term 'maiden' until Laura devours the goblin fruit). The physical deterioration of Laura signifies the detrimental effect of feminine spirit having to submit to a standard that is defined and circumscribed by an opposite sex. The language used by Rossetti in describing Laura's relationship to the goblin men further supports this reading with its metaphorical implications of a romantic liaison between lovers. Rossetti states that:

> But ever in the moonlight
>
> She pined and pined away;
>
> Sought them by night and day,
>
> Found them no more, but dwindled and grew gray; (153-56)

The setting under the moonlight, the feeling of having 'pined and pined away', the relentless seeking, and the despair which resulted in having 'dwindled' and grown 'gray', when combined, seem more appropriate as a scene for a story about a pair of once-estranged but now-reconciled lovers, than a bedtime story about two little girls and a gang of goblins. After the girls' initial encounter with the goblins, Laura, despite her yearning, 'never caught again the goblin cry'. (272) This, in itself, would suggest the rigid separation of social spheres between Victorian men and women which, after the marriage (which could represent a momentary overlapping of the two spheres), each sex must adhere to in the strictest sense. Laura's deterioration after this thus significantly metaphors the pain Victorian women had to suffer, when society's middle-class conventions striped away their freedom and made them a prisoner of the domestic sphere which they were supposed to stay in after matrimony. However, Lizzie's rescue of Laura by refusing to bow to the goblin men's demand, as well as the ending of the poem which states:

> "For there is no friend like a sister
>
> In calm or stormy weather;
>
> To cheer one on the tedious way,
>
> To fetch one if one goes astray,
>
> To lift one if one totters down,
>
> To strengthen whilst one stands," (562-67)

The above quotation seems to offer a positive message in that, as grim as the situation may seem, women are not forever doomed if they can stick together and help one another. The tendency of reading the poem as a feminist text seems also

to have been legitimised by this.

From Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* to Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market', the feminine theme of the poems which depict the social entrapment of women by men and their chauvinistic middle-class ideals, represent only a fragment of a greater literary trend during the 1850s and 60s, which features works by male and female authors alike that appeal to society's conscience via their illustration of the victimisation of Victorian women. For example, the fate suffered to Bianca and Alice in Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half-Sisters* (1848), the tragedy that falls upon the heroine in Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), as well as Casaubon's apparent contempt for Dorothea's desire to involve herself in issues outside of her conventional domestic boundary in *Middlemarch* (1872), all demonstrate clearly the difficulties experienced by contemporary women in escaping from the Arnoldian image of women being subjected to the 'angel in the house' treatment. The above readings of *Aurora Leigh* and 'Goblin Market' against a feminine emancipation backdrop, thus, provide my interpretation to these two works in relation to the period's general preoccupation with cultural identity and domesticity. Numerous contemporary records, furthermore, show that, since the early 1860s, in concordance with the Divorce Act, discontent regarding the idea of women being confined to a rigidly domestic position was on the rise. Aside from the numerous works documented earlier by sensation novelists and social critics, A. James Hammerton, in *Cruelty and Companionship*, has furthermore documented numerous biographical accounts of the time that support this view by telling of women's personal struggle against society's definition of them as 'angels in the house'.[85] C. R. Ashbee, meanwhile,

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[85] See A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (London: Routledge, 1992).

offered the following account of reflection on his Victorian grandmother's struggle against the sentiment of woman-worship which loomed over the entire mid-Victorian era:

> Even after the law of England has been altered men still could not believe that a woman might have a life and soul of her own. Where love and unity between husband and wife are continuous, here is one life and soul, but where husband and wife grow apart instead of together, perhaps it is better to face bravely the tremendous consequences that follow. It is not a thing to be lightly done.[86]

The perception that women cannot have a life and soul of their own, and that between husband and wife there should exist only one harmonious soul, is an idea that is exemplary of the Victorian middle-class ideal regarding domesticity. The notion of men for the field and women for the house making one complete soul represents essentially a denial of women's rights to a public life, thus binding their souls to domestic duty forever. However, despite this being the dominating idea during the time, as the two poems discussed here have shown, during the middle of the nineteenth century, a trend is beginning to establish itself which sees women finding more and more encouragement to speak out against this tradition, by either passively but accurately portraying the reality of this injustice ('Goblin Market'), or aggressively urging women on to independence and freedom from domestic suppression (*Aurora Leigh*). This shows that during this period, not only has the unfairness in the treatment of women by the Victorian middle-class ideals been recognised, but positive actions, at the same time, are also being taken. By revising the social construction of Victorian gender in which the idea of women

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[86] C. R. Ashbee, *'Grannie': A Victorian Cameo* (Oxford: Published Privately, 1939), p. 62.

and morality are firmly and inflexibly embedded in the domestic sphere, what Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti were able to accomplish is the injection of hope in the possibility of women being capable of having a public life while still retaining their morality. Not only did the works of Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti predate the New Women phenomenon by decades, but in many ways, they also laid a foundation which undoubtedly contributed to, and ensured, the eventual success of woman's emancipation.

IV. The Rise of the New Woman

In this chapter, what I have been trying to show is that the notions of domesticity and femininity, like religion and morality, are both very much regarded as an important prerequisite for the manifestation of nineteenth century Englishness, and Victorian cultural identity would be shaken if any of its institutional forms are disturbed. The sensation novels of the 1860s and 1870s contribute to this cultural debate by raising doubts about previously accepted notions of home being always moralistic and women being an automatic extension of it. The poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti show an entirely new realm of prospect by suggesting the possibility of women escaping from their conventional confinement of domesticity, while still being able to retain their morality and well-being. The parallel between sensation novels and the works of the two female poets is that they both mark a moment of awakening against a fundamental flaw that existed in society's concept of cultural convention; but due to the fact that this middle-class convention just happens to be one of the basic institutional forms of Victorian cultural identity, it is inevitable

that such works would be met with criticism protesting against their portrayal of the opposite of the conventional domestic ideals. However, the contemporary public was actually quite ready to accept such works, along with the ideas represented in them. This is important because it signifies that mid-Victorian society is already in the process of drifting away from their traditional ideals, and is beginning to question its own sense of association with the conventional middle-class principle of domesticity, in which femininity seems to be hopelessly and pointlessly trapped. It is also a fact that is recognisable not only in our time, but in its original Victorian context as well. G. H. Lewes, for instance, is one of the Victorians who is able to decipher the following facts:

> The appearance of Woman in the field of literature is a significant fact. It is the correlate of her position in society. To some men the fact is doubtless as distasteful as the social freedom of women in Europe must be to an eastern mind [yet] it is certain that the philosophic eye sees in this fact of literature cultivated by women, a significance not lightly to be passed over.[87]

Although, given Lewes's widely publicised relationship with George Eliot, it is undeniable that in writing this statement Lewes probably had a personal interest in mind, the objective tone of this passage, along with the textual evidences I have supplied in this chapter, nevertheless point to an emerging social interest in the emancipation of women from their conventional sphere of femininity and domesticity. The popularity of sensation novels during the mid-nineteenth century, along with the popularity of Mrs. Browning and Christina Rossetti, support my claim with their depiction of domesticity and femininity in non-conventional

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[87] G. H. Lewes, 'The Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review*, 58 (1852), 129-141 (p. 129).

contexts. In more than one way, they also helped pave the path for the emergence of the Victorian decadence. Works such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), and *A Child of the Jago* (1896), for example, with their distinctly pessimistic depiction of the world as a less-than-ideal place, clearly owe something to the portrayal of the chaotic home in sensation novels. Thomas Hardy even admited openly that he utilises in his fictions a great deal of what he regards as the four key aspects of sensation novels, which are 'Mystery, entanglement, surprise and moral obliquity.'[88] The theme of 'moral obliquity', in particular, would dominate the majority of his later novels, including *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Public acceptance towards the issue of English morality, indeed, has undergone an observable process of change. Even the tone of John Ruskin's criticism towards sensation novels, in 1880, became somewhat altered as he states:

> The speciality of the plague is a delight in the exposition of the relations between guilt and decrepitude; and I call the results of it literature "of the prison-house", because the thwarted habits of body and mind, which are the punishment of reckless crowding in cities, become, in the issue of that punishment, frightful subjects of exclusive interest to themselves; and the art of fiction in which they finally delight is only the more studied arrangement of illustration, by coloured firelights, of the daily bulletins of their own wretchedness, in the prison calendar, the police news, and the hospital report.[89]

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[88] Thomas Hardy, Prefatory Notes to *Desperate Remedies* (1871; London: MacMillan, 1912), p. vii. See also Lawrence O. Jones, 'Desperate Remedies and the Victorian Sensation Novel', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 20 (1965), 35-50.

[89] John Ruskin, 'Fiction – Fair and Foul', *Nineteenth Century*, 7 (1880), 941-962 (p. 948).

Although the words of condemnation are still present, it is, however, interesting to note that while Ruskin attacks sensation novels for their 'exposition of the relations between guilt and decrepitude,' he also acknowledges the fact that these elements did not originate from the novels themselves, but were inspired by 'the prison calendar, the police news, and the hospital report.' Thus, twenty years after the appearance of *The Woman in White*, criticism of the genre has shifted from accusation of introducing immorality to society, to that of spreading immoral ideas irresponsibly. Along with the increasingly frequent allusion to topics that are traditionally considered immoral in the social literature of the time,[90] this shift of attitude of the criticism of sensation novels implies a symbolic defeat for the moralists because society, at this point, has seemingly come to accept the fact that immorality exists in their world, and more and more they showed signs of awareness of the distance that exists between themselves and the traditional image of their moralistic and virtuous identity.

Along with religious doubt and the social criticism of the 1860s and 70s, the unorthodox portrayal of domesticity and femininity in popular literature marks an important period in the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. These conventional middle-class ideologies were first undermined by the introduction of immorality and chaos into domesticity and femininity. And then as the theme becomes popular, the public inevitably began to reconsider the idea of a pure, moralistic existence of Englishness, which ultimately led to the rejection of society's Arnoldian principles. As the Victorian era draws to an end, the theme of

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[90] The implications of the adulterous theme of *The Woodlanders* (1887) and the mercenary motive of Jasper Milvain in *New Grub Street* (1891), for instance, reflect changes in the literary taste of the time and pave the way for the eventual success of the *Yellow Book* which, despite being denounced publicly for its 'repulsiveness and insolence', sold out three editions within the first week of its publication.

immoral elements existing within a traditionally moralistic atmosphere would become more and more legitimised and less of a matter for moral debates. This suggests that the public was gradually rejecting the idea of a rigidly moralistic identity, and was eagerly anticipating the beginning of a new era.

4. OTHERNESS AND EMPIRE

Having considered in the previous chapters the mid-nineteenth century reconfiguration of traditional institutional forms such as religion, duty, and domesticity, and their impact on the Victorians' comprehension of cultural identity, I will investigate in this chapter the institutional form of otherness, along with its social reconfiguration and its influence on the conceptualisation of Victorian cultural identity.

As stated in the introduction, the Victorians employ the notion of otherness to designate elements that are considered undesirable onto an external entity, which allows them to justifiably proclaim Victorian cultural identity to be free of immorality and chaos (see introduction). Although as an institutional form it is no more or less important than its counterparts in the overall structure of nineteenth century Britishness, otherness presents more difficulties for us to understand because it differs distinctly from our previously-examined institutional forms, in the sense that while the former three can claim a direct connection with the middle-class oriented Victorian culture as a product of 'cultural elaboration', otherness cannot. In other words, for religion, duty, and domesticity, their claim for legitimacy comes from one's ability to trace through the history of British culture different manifestations of similar concepts (such as England's religiousness in contrast to her atheistic colonies, or the portrayal of domesticity in Shakespeare), making them historicised 'internal' components to the concept of Victorian cultural identity.

Otherness, by contrast, is ahistorical in nature and functions strictly on an 'external' basis to Victorian cultural identity. It should be considered mainly a fabricated concept based on prejudice rather than anything innately found within a

particular aspect of British culture, and it relies heavily on the civilisation's view of itself in contrast to what it perceives as the external world. As has been outlined already, the main reason for the gaining presence of the institutional form of otherness in the early nineteenth century is due to Britain's uneasy relationship with France (which as the century progressed reconfigured itself into an east-west relationship). The concept of otherness, during this time, becomes subconsciously employed by the Victorians as a means to distinguish the perceived 'superiority' of Britishness from the rest of the world, especially early on from the French and later from the 'decadent' natives of the British colonies – a reason that is sometimes used to justify colonisation in the first place. Beginning in the 1850s, however, concurrent with the debate on the abolition of colonialism (mainly India), the notion of otherness would enter a period of decline which, although it never does completely dissimilate (this is true for all four institutional forms), the moments of doubt that were emerging are nonetheless enough to convince the public to subconsciously ponder their ideas regarding otherness and its connection to their perceived cultural identity. Given the strong colonial context of nineteenth century Britain, any discourse of otherness during this period inevitably leads to the concept of Orientalism. Indeed, as the empire continues to grow throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, Orientalism, which dignifies the morality of Englishness by subjugating the East (a locale which happened to be the main focus of empirical expansion at the time) in a specific and systemic manner, gained simultaneous prominence. Patrick Brantlinger, echoing Tom Nairn, believes that it 'is not possible to define English/British nationalism in isolation from imperialism.'[1] To begin this chapter, therefore, I will first turn to the Victorian interpretation of Orientalism before the 1850s,

[1] Brantlinger, 'Imagining the Nation', p. 337.

alongside its role in defining otherness in relation to cultural identity. Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, has meticulously outlined the formation of this concept, and retraced the process of how it successfully rooted itself in English society and supported its cultural image. His interpretation of this discourse will be referred to constantly throughout this chapter as a foundation for the Victorians' attitude towards what they considered as 'other'. However, Said's attempt to make sense of the entire Western perception of the East is also too Europocentric and monolithic in timeframe for our analysis of Victorian society. Therefore, in order to compensate this, new and further evidences outside the scope of *Orientalism* will also be looked at.

This chapter is an attempt to understand the rise and fall of otherness within a strictly British and Victorian context. Its aim will be to study how the Victorians' conceptualisation of the East helps shape their sense of selfhood and comes to epitomise Victorian cultural identity. I will begin this study with a detailed account of the prominence of Victorian Orientalism before the 1850s, in order to examine how such a vision of otherness successfully establishes itself as an institutional form during the nineteenth century, eventually incorporating itself into the popular notion regarding cultural identity. In the second and third parts of this chapter, attempts will then be made to retrace some of the major reasons behind the weakening of the influence of otherness as an institutional form, which took place from the 1850s to 70s. Its impact on the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity will then be assessed.

I. Rise of Orientalism: History

Otherness and Orientalism go hand-in-hand in terms of dictating the overall image of Victorian cultural identity. Orientalism represents the western discourse that views the east (a non-western entity) through a prejudiced and negative light. To do so, the Victorians rely on the idea of otherness which externalises everything outside of the British self as 'other', and utilise this 'other' as a reversed-mirror to construct the identity of the non-Oriental self. Because the early Victorian perception of otherness is based solely upon the idea of Orientalism (in which the perception of the east as a presence of evil and immorality directly contributes to the formation of Victorian cultural identity's moralistic image), it is important for us to understand this initial mythologisation of the east in relation to Arnoldian Britishness. In *Orientalism*, Said cogently argues that this discourse is the result of a general sense of permeating prejudice, and shows how it prompts the west to regard eastern nations and races as both culturally and morally inferior. But while the existence of this type of cultural discrimination serves many purposes, the justification of colonialism being a major one, for my intention of understanding the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity after the 1850s, I will focus my study on one unique and highly specific characteristic of Orientalism – its function as a cultural discourse that gives Britain a sense of identity, by deflecting all undesirables onto a perceived eastern other. In this sense, Orientalism represents a powerful driving force behind the institutional form of otherness, and its main role is to secure within Victorian cultural identity ideas such as cultural superiority and morality.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, the relevance of Orientalism within Britishness is most prominently featured in two aspects: that of public

opinions regarding the East in general, and of aesthetic objects which reflect the popular taste and belief. In terms of public opinion, during the build-up of conventional Victorian cultural identity, according to the principles outlined by Thomas Arnold prior to 1837 (see introduction), the dominating trend can be summed up as a collective and narrow demonstration of the belief of the West's superiority over the East. Such belief is reflected in the portrayal of the Orient in *Gulliver's Travel*, the role of Man Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* (who despite his many recommendable characteristics, remains inferior and a subordinate to Crusoe), Edmund Burke's numerous pro-Britain speeches, as well as the Duke of Wellington's declaration that 'he had never met a Hindu with a single good quality,' and that there was 'more perjury in the town of Calcutta alone than [...] in all Europe taken together.'[2] All these and much more would contribute to proving and prolonging the Victorians' belief in their superiority over the East, and provide a solid foundation for Orientalism to function as an innate cultural norm that is believed to confirm the existence of Victorian middle-class morality. It should be noted that before the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain's attempt to correct this misapprehension was minimal, and rare exceptions such as *Othello* are almost always treated as literary anomaly, with their contents and authorial intentions being subjects of debate and review even to this day. Thus, Orientalism, to say the least, is as firmly established as religion, duty, and domesticity, during the early parts of the nineteenth century, as an institutional form that constitutes Victorian cultural identity.[3]

Although the full impact of Orientalism on the shaping of Victorian society is

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[2] Quoted in C. Northcote Parkinson, *East and West* (London: John Murray, 1963), p. 196.
[3] For more information, see Said, *Orientalism*; as well as Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

still very much a matter of scholarly debate these days,[4] on the subject of Victorians having a negative perception of the east in general, there can be no denial of its existence. Percival Spear, for instance, admits that during the nineteenth century, while 'increasing contact and knowledge of Indian life' did occur, it is apparently not enough to nullify the conventional prejudice that regards 'everything Indian [as] irrational, superstitious, barbaric and typical of an inferior civilization.'[5] This shows Orientalism to be very much a self-fulfilling prophecy. No matter how obvious the truth of the East is to the colonisers, their Orientalistic preconceptions always comes first in dictating their idea of the East, alongside their notion of Victorian cultural identity.

In Britain's relationship with China during the nineteenth century, this same sense of prejudice similarly looms. For example, in China there had long existed a tradition of scholarship and aristocracy that westerners had undoubtedly been aware of even before the beginning of the Victorian era. In 1569, for instance, the publication of Gaspar da Cruz's *Tractado da China* has clearly recorded the bureaucratic examination system which China has employed since the Han Dynasty (200BC);[6] and half a century before that, western missionaries such as Cristovao Viera and Galiote Pereira, on separate occasions, had written extensively about the Chinese equivalent of aristocracy ("Loutea"). These documents are important in the sense that, being some of the earliest records of

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[4] For example, Emily A. Haddad argues in *Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in Nineteenth-Century English and French Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) that different aspects of the east are actually constantly being integrated by the Victorians into the development of western poetry, whereas a fundamentally opposite view is maintained by Roger Adelson in *London and the Invention of the Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) that not only had knowledge of the Orient made little impact on the shaping of the west's cultural consciousness, but Orientalism would persist throughout the nineteenth century with the image of the Middle East being constantly misrepresented.

[5] Percival Spear, *The Nabobs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 129.

[6] See Charles Ralph Boxer (ed.), *South China in the 16th Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953).

China by foreigners, they prove that the Chinese tradition of scholarship and aristocracy was not shrouded in mystery but was easily visible to observers from foreign lands.[7] Furthermore, evidence also suggests that such texts were available to British readers almost immediately after their publication. For instance, Francis Bacon, before 1605, was pleasantly intrigued by da Cruz's description of the Chinese writing system and respected and admired it so much that he suggested the creation of a universal language based on Chinese characters (an idea which Gottfried W. Leibniz and Isaac Newton would later endorse).[8] This means that not only had da Cruz's writing been known to the English readers before the nineteenth century, but it is apparently also in circulation among readers who were interested in its topic. During the nineteenth century, however, the western travellers' perception of China had deteriorated so much that the image of China was often associated solely with abuse, immorality, and evilness. The sense of respect and admiration that was shown by Bacon and others is simply nowhere to be found. In Wang Jianan and Cai Xiaoli's compilation of popular postcards sent home by foreigners (including British traders) who resided in China at the time,[9] the images shown were unanimously negative. There are more than eighty postcards in the collection that I have identified to be of English origin (with texts printed in English on the postcards). But among them, only a few managed to

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[7] Although there is absolutely no mention of the Chinese bureaucratic examination system in Marco Polo's account of his journey, an explanation has been offered by Teng Ssu-yu in that during the time of Marco Polo's alleged stay in China (1271-1295), the land was under Mongolian rule and from 1257-1315, the government was strongly against the traditional Chinese examination and outlawed this during the entire era. But of course, whether Marco Polo has ever actually been to China or not is still a matter of heavy debate. For more information, see Teng Ssu-yu & John K. Fairbank (ed.), *China's Response to the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); and Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1995).

[8] See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 223 & 226-227.

[9] See Wang Jianan & Cai Xiaoli, *Postcards of the Qing Dynasty* (Beijing: China Republic University Press, 2004). In Chinese.

portray China in a positive or at least truthful light. Instead, most of them had chosen to portray and present China through its working class, which includes Chinese labourers, beggars, sedan chair carriers (with westerners comfortably occupying the seat), and for obvious reasons, opium smokers. For instance, on one particular postcard which features a Chinese outdoor eatery (Fig. 4), while there is no question that such establishments exist and are commonly found behind dockyards where coolies gather, the question that comes to mind is why is such a picture presented in the first place? If English traders are interested in showing families and friends back home what a Chinese eatery looks like, then such an establishment does not represent a sensible choice because there are numerous other more representative and respectable dinning establishments that undoubtedly better reflect the Chinese taste and culture, of which English traders and diplomats are known to be frequent patrons. The fact is also that such unhygienic and lowly establishments as featured in the postcard are not usually located in noticeable areas. This means the Western photographer who shot this postcard must have gone out of his way to locate this picture. The only plausible explanation for this seems to be that the point is not so much about the portrayal of the real China, but to show the Victorian public back home something that they wanted to see. According to otherness and Orientalism this means the imagery of China in a derogatory light.

Indeed, of all the postcards in this collection, pretty much every single one shows a tendency to depict China in an unanimously unfavourable light. For example, the image of Westerners being carried in sedan chairs by Chinese labourers (Fig. 5) seems to be a popular reflection of China because of its insinuation of the different social classes among the Chinese and the English. Portrayals of Chinese beggars (Fig. 6) and poverty-stricken families (Fig. 7) are

also abundant for similar reasons. The depictions of Chinese criminals being tortured and executed are also abundant because they attest to the Orientalistic idea of the Chinese being cruel and inhumane (Fig. 8 & 9). The fact, however, is that a westerner is much more likely to come into contact in China with a Chinese aristocrat or trader than a criminal, labourer, or beggar. Thus the postcards' unanimous showing of these out-of-the-place elements suggests an articulate process of vilification at work. This exemplifies the Victorians' biased view of China and the influence of Oriental otherness, because the deliberate selection of debased and humiliating images demonstrate a motif to present not the real China, but one that matches the fabricated impression of China according to common Victorian misconception. This further confirms the significance of Oriental otherness on Victorian cultural identity, because like religion, duty, and domesticity, it is an institutional form that deliberately stresses the importance of Arnoldian middle-class values such as morality and cultural superiority. It also demonstrates how otherness is understood by the Victorians as a direct incarnation of the notion of Orientalism, because it offers a means of distinguishing and protecting the Victorian identity from immoral foreign threats. The early manifestation of Victorian otherness, as a result, is closely connected with Orientalism, and the Victorians rely on this to solidify the moralism of their own cultural identity. As long as this myth of the corrupted 'other' remains intact, the virtuous reputation of Victorian cultural identity, as opposed to the immoral Orient, is ensured.

However, after the 1850s, when the voices of 'dissent' regarding the abolition of colonies began to gather momentum, the myth of the 'evil Orient' noticeably weakened as public sympathies shifted towards the natives of the colonies. Although it is possible to regard the jingoistic opinions of the time as

counter-evidence to this phenomenon (the Chinese postcards from the late nineteenth century can be seen as a manifestation of this as well, because the preservation of Oriental colonies such as Hong Kong, was obviously important to the postcard merchants), the fact that the abolition of colonialism could become a topic of the day nonetheless shows a shift in the nation's opinion from its earlier days. And in truth, if anything, the jingoist phenomenon only confirms this shift of public opinion from the conventional absolutist's view of the immoral other, to a more open-minded one where the jingoist plays the role of the enthusiastic salvager. Therefore, it would be more correct to treat the jingoistic phenomenon as a reflection of society's uncertainty regarding its conventional view, along with the traditional definition of cultural identity.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, when the three Victorian cultural institutional forms of religion, duty, and domesticity suffer from simultaneous doubts (as has been discussed in the previous chapters), the concept of otherness, too, would undergo extensive scrutiny leading to its detachment from Orientalism into becoming something else. In the following sections, I will examine this shift of public opinion towards otherness in relation to the concept of cultural identity, and argue its importance as a force that dismantles this conventional institutional form, which contributes to the overall reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity.

II. A. Orientalism and Otherness: French Influence

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said cites the emerging differences between 'Latent Orientalism' and 'Manifest Orientalism' as the main factor that leads to the reconfiguration of the myth of otherness. By his definition, 'Latent Orientalism' means the traditional attitude held by the Western world regarding the Orient, in which the 'very designation of something Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgement'.[10] 'Manifest Orientalism', on the other hand, is the result of the changing attitude towards the East, where newfound knowledge and information brought back by travellers contradict conventional beliefs and its idea regarding otherness. Although the emergence of 'Manifest Orientalism' would no doubt have been effective in shaking the public's faith in otherness, according to Said and his supporters,[11] history shows that 'Manifest Orientalism' could not have made a serious impact until (at the earliest) the beginning of the twentieth century. This means that for the perceptible decline of otherness to take place during the nineteenth century, 'Manifest Orientalism' could not have been responsible. So what prompted the reconfiguration of Victorian otherness in the first place? The answer evidently lies in a 'Latent Orientalism' of a different nature – one that nevertheless involves a set of false presumptions about the East but from a different perspective, which originated from France but spread to England during the early part of the nineteenth century.

First of all, let us examine the difference between the English and French attitude towards the Orient. The British, on the strength of their empire,

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[10] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 207.

[11] In addition to Said, see also George Bearce, 'British Attitudes to Asia', in *The Glass Curtain Between Asia and Europe*, ed. Raghavan Iyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 201-215; and Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

traditionally looked upon the East with contempt and disrespect – a mentality that for decades had hindered their ability to dispel the myth of Orientalism. This contempt the British have for the Orient during the first half of the nineteenth century is illustrated in the dress code of British subjects living in the East. In *Eöthen* (1844), for instance, the following incident was recorded with an unmistakable sense of pride by Alexander Kinglake:

> Nablus is the very furnace of Mohammedan bigotry, and I believe that only a few months before the time of my going there it would have been madly rash for a man, unless strongly guarded, to show himself to the people of the town in a Frank costume, but since the insurrection the Mohammedans of the place had been so far subdued by the severity of Ibrahim Pasha that they dared not now offer the slightest insult to a European. It was quite clear, however, that the effort with which the men of the old school refrained from expressing their opinion of a hat or a coat was horribly painful to them. As I walked through the streets or the bazaars a dead silence prevailed.[12]

Kinglake's apparent delight in parading around a non-Western town in his 'Frank costume', and the pleasure he took in deprecating the local culture, knowing that the inhabitants 'dared not [...] offer the slightest insult to a European', illustrate the inflated ego of a typical British traveller. With such an arrogant attitude, it is not hard to predict failure in Britain's ability to register any true fact about the Orient, even though one may be surrounded by an Eastern culture for an extended period of time. Throughout the Victorian era, this sense of British arrogance as displayed by Kinglake continues to strengthen the cultural belief of Britain's

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[12] Alexander Kinglake, *Eöthen*, intro. Barbara Kreiger (1844; New York: Marlboro, 1992), p. 209.

superiority, and it further fortifies the idea of otherness by contrasting itself sharply with the image of the barbaric and immoral Orient. John Rodenbeck points out that, prior to the nineteenth century, it is actually a common practise for an English traveller to dress himself according to the local fashion, which allows easier movements and greater protection from the local weather and local hostilities.[13] But after the turn of the century, this tendency changed and travellers like Kinglake, despite acknowledging the obvious feeling of uneasiness as he walks through an Oriental street, uncompromisingly insists on his English attire. This kind of insistence is seemingly senseless, but it does illustrate a sense of insecurity in the Englishman who fears that Oriental clothing would somehow assimilate the despised Oriental quality into his English heritage. Although there are historical records of Kinglake's contemporaries, such as the painter David Roberts, who travels in Egypt in Oriental garments, he apparently did so for 'being officially required to wear Turkish clothing in Egyptian mosques in 1839 and 1840'. According to John Rodenbeck, 'it is clear that Roberts usually dressed in European clothing during his travels.'[14] The fact is that it was not until the 1860s when Englishmen would be seen once again cladding themselves in non-European clothing, that figures such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Richard Burton made Oriental fashions popular once more. The difference between Kinglake and Burton and their respectively conservative and decadent attitudes, along with the timing of their writings, provide a good factual reflection of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. I will return to discuss this shift of public mentality in the next chapter.

Returning to my analysis of otherness and Victorian cultural superiority,

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[13] See John Rodenbeck, 'Dressing Native', in *Unfolding the Orient: Travellers in Egypt and the Near East*, ed. Paul and Janet Starkey (Reading: Ithaca, 2001), pp. 65-100.

[14] Ibid., p. 82.

unlike the English, the defeat of Napoleon and the loss of Egypt have freed the French from their predisposition to look upon the East as a land to be ruled and conquered. The ability to view the East in un-imperialistic terms has enabled the French to observe with an open mind and interpret the Orient with less prejudice. Said, in *Orientalism*, makes this argument on numerous occasions and is precise in pointing out that 'the French pilgrim was imbued with a sense of acute loss in the Orient.'[15] And in French paintings and literature of the time, the notion of a truer Orient (at least compared to the English interpretation) is reflected. Indeed, prior to the nineteenth century, the French perception of the Orient was not unlike that of the British, which is often patronising and unobservant as exemplified by Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire* (1810) – a work which Said heavy criticises for pushing 'people, places, and ideas around in the Orient as if nothing could resist his imperious imagination'[16]. However, shortly after the defeat of Napoleon which effectively ended the nation's imperial dream, a sharp departure from Chateaubriand's arrogant tone can be detected in its writings. For example, in Alphonse de Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient* (1835), the East no longer represents a land waiting to be tamed and conquered, but reflects a mystical ideal which captures the writer's imagination with its ancient grandeur and glories, where 'on découvre éclatante et immuable en effaçant de la main la rouille humaine'.[17] Although as Said points out, Lamartine is guilty like his predecessors, in the sense that he is unable to transcend the prejudice of his time and desires to see a more civilised East, the failure to distinguish Lamartine's passionate view of the Orient from Chateaubriand's highly imperialistic one is simply unfair. It may be undeniable that both Chateaubriand and Lamartine have respectively expressed

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[15] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 169.
[16] Ibid., p. 171.
[17] Alphonse de Lamartine, *Voyage en Orient* (Paris: Librairie de Charles Gosselin, 1835), p. 469.

similar colonial views in their works, but the fact still remains that for Chateaubriand, the spirit of imperialism was his starting point and his main purpose for travelling to the East; whereas for Lamartine, it was the poetic vision of the Orient that attracted him in the first place. As one biographer puts it, through his journey and observation, Lamartine 'developed a permanent interest in the peoples, religions and civilisations of the Turkish Empire', an affection that would last a lifetime.[18] And no matter how misguided (or romanticised) his aesthetic interpretation of the Orient may be, most importantly, Lamartine's account shows a shift of mentality from the pre-Napoleonic imperialistic vision, to one that intends to observe and understand.

Similarly, when Gérard de Nerval journeyed to the East during the early 1840s, his intention was no longer one that adheres to Chateaubriand's imperialism, but instead echoes Lamartine's romantic passion for the Orient. In one of the passages from Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851), for instance, he describes the following scene:

> [W]ithout any warning, except a faint glimmer of white, the sun suddenly splits the horizon. Often it seems to struggle, though, as it hoists up the long folds of a slate-coloured shroud; it appears pale to us, at such times, and robbed of its rays, like the subterranean Osiris; its faded imprint augments the sadness of the arid sky, which is then the very image of an overcast sky in Europe, but instead of bringing down rain, this sky will absorb every drop of humidity. The turbid dust that clogs the horizon never breaks up into fresh clouds, as our European mists do; even at zenith the sun only just manages to pierce a course through the cinereous

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[18] William Fortescue, *Alphonse de Lamartine: A Political Biography* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 73.

> atmosphere in the form of a fiery red disk that might well have emerged from the Libyan forges of the god Phta.[19]

Nerval's romantic vision of the Orient which finds echoes throughout his entire work, is unmistakable in this passage. Although both in the above quotation and throughout the book, images of Europe were from time to time invoked to provide readers with a clearer picture of the Eastern scene; unlike Chateaubriand, not only do these comparisons never lead to the 'superior' West and 'inferior' East dichotomy, but Nerval was also careful in conjuring distinctive images of the East (such as the shroud, Osiris, Phta, etc.) to describe what he saw in the Eastern world. One could moreover interpret his 'arid sky' as a tribute to the clement weather of the East that contrasts with the 'wetness' of Paris. Although it can be argued that both Chateaubriand's imperialistic attitude and Nerval's romantic one ultimately represent a misconception of the East (hence the discourse of Orientalism remains functional to this day), by praising the Orient (albeit in romantic terms), Nerval is basically undermining the authority of otherness which defines the East as immoral and the West moral. In many ways it poses a direct challenge to the structure of conventional Western cultural identity.

Thus, it is clear that the change of attitude towards Orientalism came much earlier to the French than to the British, who at the time were still reluctant to let go of their prejudiced viewpoints of the Orient. As I argued, for the early Victorians, in order for Orientalism to function as an institutional form within British cultural identity, its conception of the East must be an evil and immoral one. In France, however, after the fall of Napoleon, a trend is observably emerging

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[19] Gérard de Nerval, *Journey to the Orient*, trans. Norman Glass (London: Peter Owen, 1972), p. 24.

where the traditional preconception of the vileness and malevolence of the East is slowly being replaced by a deep poetic nostalgia. This new idea of the Orient would be continued through the century by other prominent French writers such as Flaubert and Victor Hugo. Thus, it can be said that in France at the very least, we are observing the beginning of the decline of Orientalism as a cultural institutional form.

In terms of the academy, it is also the French who took a more prominent role in establishing Asiatic scholarship, compared to its British counterpart. Since the establishment of Sorbonne-Nouvelle in 1796, Eastern canons such as *Zhouli*, *Yuliqiao* along with linguistic analyses of various Asian languages, had been published on a steady basis by scholars such as Abel Remusat (1788-1832), Edouard Constand Biot (1803-1850), and Stanislas Julien (1797-1873). In England, although the Asian Studies Department at the University of London was established in 1836, the purpose of it in those days was simply to provide some basic information about the lands and customs of the East to missionaries and government officials who were about to sail off to those foreign countries. The first true professorship of sinology was not established in Oxford until the 1870s, which predates the same position in Cambridge by more than a decade. The French, history shows, have indeed been the more eager discoverers of the true Orient than the English in the course of recent history. And it is through the spread of this attitude to Britain that the Victorian public would begin to adjust their mentality towards Orientalism and otherness.

As stated in the introduction, before the idea of Orientalism was able to take root in British society to the extent of becoming responsible for the conceptualisation of Victorian cultural identity, otherness was already an integral part of Britishness but it existed mainly to distinguish Britain from her continental

'nemesis', instead of the Orient. However, with the approach of the Victorian era and the maturity of British imperialism, Orientalism would supersede the earlier anti-French sentiment to dictate the definition of otherness as an institutional form. It is, therefore, ironic that the Victorians would later be influenced by the French perspective, and reconfigure their notion of otherness accordingly. It has been well-documented that, during the early Victorian era, British intellectuals were becoming increasingly interested and receptive to ideas from the continent. Carlyle, for example, was famously devoted to the works Goethe, and Wordsworth and Coleridge were similarly unpretentious in their affection towards contemporary French and German poets. Within this trend of European cultural exchange, England and France were able to forge a particularly close relationship. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, the relationship between England and France, as it had been for many years, was unpleasant if not downright hostile. To the English, the French (like the Orient) had always been regarded as an 'Other' upon which undesirable cultural elements are imposed. This is best exemplified in William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786). The story, written in French, tells of the adventure of Vathek, an apparent descendant of one Caliph Haroun al Raschid, who is one day paid a mysterious visit by an Indian sorcerer. He then becomes obsessed with building a tower that would mimic Babel in order to satisfy his desire to pursue wicked pleasure and forbidden knowledge. Along with the appearances of evil characters such as Princess Nouronihar, Carathis the witch, and the genie who rescues the fifty children Vathek is about to sacrifice, the tale vividly portrays the wickedness and insidiousness of the East (which the writer denied could be found on English soil, despite the fact that by Beckford's own admission, many of the characters were modelled after his English relatives). Although Beckford is widely regarded at the time to be an eccentric man who

took pleasure in the wild and decadent, and had made no secret of his personal identification with Vathek, he nonetheless chose to associate 'corruption' with a foreign place rather than his English homeland. It is also a fact that Beckford chose French rather than English to compose his novel. This shows he would rather identify his own wickedness with the French, and also further implies that although he admitted his own potential for vileness and malevolence, he would rather portray himself as a deviant from the English moralistic norm. To write in French is therefore to metaphorically expatriate himself from Britain, his homeland.

Similar attitudes can be found in Eyles Irwin's *Saint Thomas's Mount* (1774), in which the entire Muslim population is portrayed as an evil race which 'delights in bloodshed; and by rapine lives!',[20] as well as in the diplomat T. D. Broughton's conviction that the Indians are 'proud and jealous as the Chinese, vain and unpolished as the Americans, and as tyrannical and perfidious as the French.'[21]

After the turn of the century, however, changes in this attitude would slowly take shape in that the perception of things French as 'otherness' grew detectably faint, and the exchange between English and French cultural ideas became more and more common and popular. During the later half of the eighteenth century, for instance, touring of the continent became a popular pastime for intellectuals, and the poetic representation of France by the likes of Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth helped integrate the ideas of the two cultures. Wordsworth, for example, was frank and sincere in his admiration of the spirit of the French revolution, and became so absorbed in French politics that he regarded himself as

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[20] Eyles Irwin, *Saint Thomas's Mount*, II. 156.
[21] T. D. Broughton, *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp* (London: Constable, 1892), pp. 246-247. Published posthumously.

'a patriot' whose 'heart was all / Given to the people, and my love was theirs'.[22] In Oxford and Cambridge, meanwhile, debates were constantly taking place concerning the philosophies of Rousseau and Voltaire. All these are essentially establishing the foundation for mid-Victorians like Matthew Arnold and George Eliot to openly express their admiration for the novels of George Sand. The cultural exchange between France and Britain began shortly after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic war. As F. C. Green states, the assimilation of French ideas into Victorian ideology peaks probably around the 1850s, in which:

> [T]he constantly expanding intercourse between French and British people of all classes dispelled a great deal of the mutual ignorance and many of the absurd prejudices during the wars of the First Empire. By the close of the Second Empire, the two peoples were better informed than at any previous period in their history about each others' manners, habits and general way of life.[23]

At that time, novelists from both sides of the strait were indeed very keen on exerting influences on each others. Despite this fact, the Victorian public stubbornly refuses to admit it. *The Saturday Review*, for instance, is adamant in drawing a sharp distinction between the novels of England and France, and assumes all French novels to be 'books which ought not to run loose upon an English drawing-room table;' and that the 'moral they teach is not that we should not commit crimes, but that we should commit them neatly.' [24] But in truth, the relationship between the English and French novel is an intricate one. W. M. Thackeray, for example, is just one of the many Victorians who were not afraid to

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[22] William Wordsworth, *Prelude*, IX. 124-126.
[23] F. C. Green, *French & British civilization, 1850-1870* (London: J. M Dent & Sons, 1965), p. 10.
[24] 'French Novels', *The Saturday Review*, 21 (1866), 615-616 (pp. 615-16).

be frank about their admiration for their French counterparts. Not only did he profess over and over again his admiration for the French novelist Charles de Bernard, whose tales were even adapted by Thackeray into titles such as *The Bedford-Row Conspiracy* (1853), but he was also happy to base his own style on what he considered a merit in the French novel. The ironic and sentimental tone that makes *Vanity Fair* a masterpiece is unmistakably reminiscent of Bernard's *Les Ailes d'Icare*, which was published almost a decade before the appearance of Thackeray's novel.

Therefore, popular opinion represents only one side of reality. To those who actually took the time to find out and judge for themselves the truth about French literature, few returned unrewarded. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for instance, once recorded in her diary the following passage:

> Finished Lamartine who is a poet too – tho' he is a Frenchman. *Can any good poetry come out of Paris*? – My answer today is quite a different one from what it wd. have been a year ago.[25]

This entry, dated 1831, shows that during the early part of the nineteenth century there were indeed deep misunderstandings and even a feeling of animosity held by English readers towards French literature. However, the passage also demonstrates that for readers like Mrs. Browning who followed their interest in French literature, what they discovered often contradicted what society had led them to believe. As the Victorian age matures, one can very easily observe the increasing influence of French literature on its Victorian counterpart, and

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[25] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Barretts at Hope End: The Early Diary of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Elizabeth Berridge (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 181.

vice-versa. For example, Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough were never shy about admitting their admiration for the works of George Sand; and similarly, despite George Gissing's obstinate claim that he was a true follower of Dickens, his works speak for themselves in that they owe more to the dark realism of Zola than to the cheerful comedy of Dickens.[26] In terms of the book market, it is also obvious that French literature was embraced by British readers during the nineteenth century. Not only were the likes of Dumas and Hugo household names in England by the 1840s, but from the 'Parlour Library' which advertised itself as a provider of books 'for all', many of George Sand's novels were also available as shilling volumes (the six-volume edition of Sand's translated novels would eventually be published in England in 1847).

Therefore, the influx of French ideas and the assimilation of their values into Victorian society is an evident one. In terms of otherness, the French idea of this discourse becomes significant to its English counterpart through this channel. During the mid-nineteenth century, not only would names like Lamartine, Nerval, and Hugo become familiar to Victorian readers, but in terms of cultural identity, the comparatively positive view of the French regarding the land, culture, and people of the Orient is able to subtly influence the perspective of the Victorian public, to the extent of altering their preconceived idea regarding Orientalism and otherness. The fact that around the 1850s Britain began to experience a sudden fascination with Chinoiserie and other Eastern aesthetic objects, which originated from France, is testimony to this fact.[27] Through this French influence, the Victorians began to appreciate the French perspective on the Orient, and the East

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[26] See Constance D. Harsh, 'Gissing's *The Unclassed* and the Perils of Naturalism', *ELH*, 59 (1992), 911-938.

[27] See Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

became transformed into an aesthetic and tasteful entity rather than a conventionally horrifying and immoral one. The Victorians soon faced the dilemma of the reconsideration of cultural identity based on their new interpretation of the Orient.[28] In the following section, I shall proceed to examine the impact of this reconfiguration of otherness on the overall reception of conventional Victorian cultural identity.

II. B. The Reconfiguration of Victorian Otherness: British Politics

In addition to the influx of French ideas pertaining to the Orient, within Britain, the relationship between Orientalism and otherness had also undergone a process of self-deconstruction which was triggered by the government's imperial policies of the time. Let us first consider the following: in the year 1794, a book called *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published without much fanfare. Although it did not send a wave of joy among the British reading public at the time, it nonetheless marked an important event in the world of publication – it is the first book written in English by a non-native speaker of the language. The author, Dean Mahomet (or Dun Muhammad), is a Muslim who served in the army of the East India Company in his youth. He came to Europe in 1784 and eventually settled down in London and Brighton and married an English woman. His book recounts his journey through various places in his native country; and

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[28] By saying that the French view of the Orient differs from the English's, I wish to clarify that by no means does it imply the French were able to see past all the contemporary prejudices and regard the Orient as it truly is; instead, the difference between French and English Orientalism lies not so much in perception but in attitude, and that compared to the English, contemporary French simply had a more positive view regarding the Oriental world. In terms of cultural identity, this is crucial because it implies not only that the Orient is no longer vile, but it can be also pleasant and wonderful, signifying a mentality that directly contradicts the cultural function of Orientalism as a mirror of Western morality.

unlike books of similar kinds by Westerners, it offers a non-prejudiced perspective of the customs and traditions of the lands that is uncommon in an English publication. As Michael H. Fisher correctly summarises, 'Dean Mahomet's book presented Indians as human beings worthy of respect in their own terms. They had virtues, superior in some ways to – albeit different from – those of Europeans. Few European works of his day took his position.'[29] Due to Mahomet's Asian roots and upbringing, it is naturally easy for him to be unhindered by the contemporary European prejudices towards the East. This allows him to portray his homeland in a positive light that is highly unusual and perhaps may even seem fantastic to his English readers.

For a Western writer to achieve this same objective, however, it would have required not only great efforts, but also unparalleled insights and complete open-mindedness. It is difficult, but it can be done. William Jones, for example, is one of the few Europeans who managed to accomplish this prior to the nineteenth century. In 1785, more than a decade before the publication of Mahomet's book, six of William Jones's 'Hymns' to Hindu deities were published in the *Asiatick Miscellany*. In the words of Jones's biographer, the hymns 'explain and adorn the mythological fictions of the Hindus, in odes which the Bramins would have approved and admired'.[30] While the biographer may have overestimated the values of these works in the eyes of a Bramin (Brahmin), Jones's works nonetheless represent one of the earliest instances of English appreciation and admiration of Eastern literature, and this proves to be a far cry from the conventional depiction of the East as vile and uncivilised (an image popularised

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[29] 'Preface to *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*', in Dean Mahomet, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, ed. Michael H. Fisher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. xviii.

[30] John Baron Teignmouth, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of Sir William Jones* (London: J. Hatchard, 1804), p. 267.

by texts such as those of Beckfords). Although the publication of the respective works of Mahomet and Jones may seem insignificant when contrasted with the great literary events of the day, their emergence is nonetheless important in the sense that they represent the first wave of literature to escape the conventional portrayal of the uncivilised East. The fact that they appeared in England and before the halcyon days of French influences begs an interesting question: why did the disintegration of Victorian Orientalism not take place sooner and before the cultural exchange of English-French ideas, when the elements for subversion were seemingly already in place? The answer is that in order to make the British public see and accept a new and objective view of the Orient – to dispel the myth that had hung in the British society for decades – it requires more than the publication of literature that tells the truth and offer a different perspective. After the mid-nineteenth century, the Victorians have seemingly found that incentive.

Traditionally, the institutional form of otherness works because Orientalism dictates that the entire Orient must be seen as one holistic entity of immorality and vileness. Thus, to the early Victorians, the East exists simply as an all encompassing image of decadence without any distinction between Hindu, Turks, or Chinese. As long as none of these races are considered among the 'civilised' parts of the world, their condition of otherness is able to enhance and confirm Britain's superiority and cultural identity. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that no exception must occur in such a holistic perception of Victorian Orientalism, because if distinction were to be made within what is essentially a fabricated view of the immoral East, then the returning reflection would lack conviction and Orientalism would lose its implication. A confirmation of this can be found in the fantastical tales of *Arabian Nights*. In this collection of stories, numerous allusions to Eastern elements, ranging from Turkish flying carpets to Indian

monsters to Chinese princesses, are united by the sole fact that they are non-Western and came from the East.[31] It is only by ignoring the dissimilarity between different Eastern cultures, that the imaginations of the story-tellers can roam freely to attribute all sorts of unorthodox principles and characteristics to these lands. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, although a commoner could probably tell there is a difference between a Chinese and a Turk, most probably would not have been able to name what those differences are. During the age of Imperialism, although greater knowledge of the East did widen the public's horizon to a certain extent, the Empire's deeper understanding of the Orient unfortunately did not alter the concept of otherness much. Prejudices were still being wildly attributed to these Oriental locales, so that no matter whether a subject under scrutiny is Turkish or Chinese, the response from a common Victorian would still have been one of contempt and disgust. For example, when Lord Elgin was dispatched to China in 1857 prior to the breakout of the second Opium War, he wrote to his wife stating that: 'I have seldom from man or woman since I came to the East heard a sentence that was reconcilable with the hypothesis that Christianity had come into the world. Detestation, contempt, ferocity, vengeance, whether Chinamen or Indian be the subject.'[32] Similarly, almost half a century later in Charles H. Pearson's *National Life and Character* (1894), although the author did try to make a distinction between 'the Chinese and the Hindoos', his attitude remained highly Orientalistic when he terms all these Oriental cultures the 'lower races', and generally assumed 'that the higher races of

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[31] In fact, some scholars are convinced that the tales within *The Arabian Nights* are not translations at all, but stories originally composed in French then translated back into Arabic in order to give them a sense of exoticness. For more information, see Husain Haddawy's introduction to *The Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Norton, 1995).

[32] W. Traves Hanes III & Frank Sanello, *The Opium Wars* (Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2002), p. 199.

men, or those which are held to have attained the highest forms of civilisation, are everywhere triumphing over the lower.' [33] Thus, although these Eastern civilisations are listed as being different and independent from each other, in principle, they are still very much regarded as a holistic one in terms of their inferiority and decadence.

Further evidence of the Victorians' inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish Eastern cultures from one another can be found in George Chinnery's well-known portrait of Karl Gützlaff (Fig. 1 & 2), a renowned missionary who was appointed the personal translator of Henry Pottinger, the first governor of Hong Kong. The portrait shows Gützlaff majestically garbed in traditional Chinese clothing, yet strangely there was also a turban wrapped around his head (The Chinese do not wear turbans). This portrait was supposedly made when Gützlaff first went to China to conduct missionary works (he ended up spending more than three quarters of his life in Asia). If Gützlaff's intention had been to attract attention and stand out among the crowd, he certainly accomplished that (although wearing his own western clothing would have achieved that also). However, in the original sketch of this portrait, Chinnery wrote explicitly in shorthand the following text: 'Mr Gützlaff in the / dress of a Fokien sailor'. This tells us clearly that the intention of Gützlaff had been to mimic the dress and clothing of the locals, probably in the hope of demonstrating his amity and thereby gaining their trust.[34] In this case, the turban (which Gützlaff probably thought was a nice touch) simply illustrates how ignorant the West was at the time about the differences between

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[33] Charles H. Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (London: MacMillan, 1894), p. 32.

[34] *Fokien* is the now obsolete translation for Fujian Province in Southern China. Since there is no such thing as an official uniform for Chinese sailors in Fujian at that time, what Chinnery means by uniform is likely to have been that of the common garb of common fishermen of the region, which makes sense since fishery was the economic backbone of the entire area until well into the 20th century.

various Oriental cultures, along the common perception of the east as simply one unified entity.[35] If the same mistake had been made by Pottinger (though it is unlikely as he would have considered it a disgrace to discard his 'superior' English heritage and dress down as a Chinese), his undisguised ignorance about the Orient in general might have excused his mistake. However, Gützlaff was not only a fluent speaker of the Chinese language, but also a highly respected authority on Chinese culture (his epitaph reads 'Apostels der Chinesen'). This shows how deeply entrenched the Victorian misunderstanding about the East was. It also reflects the fact that the idea of the Orient being simply as 'one' is indeed firmly embedded within the Victorian ideologies. If Gützlaff, as one of most eminent Western authorities on Chinese custom and culture, was unable to tell a turban from a Chinese hat, then the influence of otherness on the East being one holistic entity seems quite clear.[36]

Indeed, for much of the nineteenth century, China was continuously viewed as a part of the holistically Oriental East. Palm trees, which do not grow in China, are nonetheless found frequently in English paintings and portrayals of that country (Fig. 3). And when actual facts and specifics were presented, Victorian Orientalism would prevent the English from registering even the more superficial particulars, to the extent that every discrepancy would become a confirmation of their prejudices. For example, prior to becoming the British consulate in China in the later half of the nineteenth century, Harry Parkes spent a large portion of his youth living in China learning about its customs and language. Because he left

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[35] I first came across the sketch for this portrait in an exhibition in the Museum of Hong Kong in 2005, and the original can be found in the Peabody Essex Museum (M9765-41). The finished portrait, meanwhile, is currently located at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany (Catalogue-Nr. 8479).

[36] For more information, see George Pottinger, *Sir Henry Pottinger: First Governor of Hong Kong* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

Britain for China at a very young age (thirteen to be precise), he remains, throughout the century, one of the few Englishmen who were able to experience the Orient without the encumbrance of the prejudice of Orientalism. In 1842, immediately after the First Opium War when hatred between Britain and China was supposed to be at its peak, Parkes, who was working as an interpreter for Henry Pottinger when the latter was sent by the government to negotiate the Treaty of Nanking, recorded his impression of the Chinese officials:

> Neither Kiying nor Elepoo the High Commissioners, nor Niukien the Governor-General, were dressed finely. The two former were dressed plainer than anybody. I could not account for this at all, though I was told afterwards by Mr Morrison that the dress of a Chinese Commissioner is always very plain, because they are expected to go out from the Emperor with all possible speed and in their haste not to take any of their ornaments or finery with them. I rather like Kiying's appearance, for he has a fine manly honest countenance, with pleasantness in his looks.[37]

In this passage, not only did Parkes make no attempt to disguise his admiration for the plainly clothed Chinese officials, but he was furthermore uncommonly frank about his admiration for the appearance of one particular Chinese official, Kiying, which is unprecedented through this period when uneasiness between Britain and China was at an all-time high. Despite his own awareness of the reality of the East, Parkes, however, also seems to be keenly aware of the existence of prejudices in the Western mind, as well as the impossibility of altering that. In 1844, for

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[37] Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Life of Sir Harry Parkes* (London: MacMillan, 1894), I, p. 42. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

instance, when accompanying the newly appointed British vice-Consul of Shanghai and his advisors to their posts, he recorded in his journal that:

> All newcomers are very disgusted with China [...] I fear their visits to the North will not improve their ideas of disappointment. (73)

This comes in spite of the fact that only a year ago, travelling along the same path to the same city, Parkes himself was unmistakably impressed by what he saw:

> At ten anchored in the river in Shanghai. It certainly is, as I have heard it said before, a most beautiful place, quite romantically situated in a richly cultivated country, being well watered, as it is low and flat: there are also many trees of considerable stature. (25)

However, despite this honest acknowledgement of the existence of beauty and goodness in China, Parkes at the same time realised that his travelling companions, in spite of their being on the same path and heading towards the same destination, would never reach the same conclusion. This awareness came to Parkes even before the party began its journey, and it demonstrates his awareness of the 'othering' process that took place in the minds of his companions. It also shows that not only is otherness a very real presence that would continue to exert a fundamental influence on how the Victorians perceive the East, but it also pinpoints the institutional form of otherness to be a fundamentally middle-class experience, which prevents the recognition of the flaw within the makeup of this Orientalistic Victorian cultural identity. The result is that, as long as this middle-class oriented concept of cultural identity maintains its place within

society (which it did throughout the first half of the nineteenth century), it would be very difficult for anyone to overcome and overlook this aspect of their upbringing, and be freed from this notion of Victorian cultural identity in its narrowly defined middle-class concept.

In a picture book published in 1844 entitled *China: the Scenery, Architecture, and Social Habits of that Ancient Empire*, this unauthentic portrayal of the Orient due to otherness is further exposed.[38] The very first thing one notices about this publication is that many of the engravings within feature palm trees as part of the background scenery. But as was mentioned already, palm trees did not grow in those parts of China at the time. This illustrates the problem of the Victorians having a pre-conceptualised image of Orient, and not much intention of seeing the real Orient. Even more intriguing than the palm trees, however, is the fact that Thomas Allom, the artist who designed these pictures, had never actually set foot outside Europe, let alone visited China. The engravings were simply based on older pictures by other European artists. Given Britain's long history with India, where palm trees are a common sight, Allom's preoccupation with the trees seems understandable. However, if this is how the Orient was commonly recognised by the Victorian reading public, and that it was acceptable for facts to be distorted and misrepresented in order 'fit' one culture's pre-conceptualised notion of another, then it would indeed be very difficult to dispel the myth of Orientalism.

The fact that the Victorian public would eventually doubt otherness as an institutional form is due to two major political factors of the nineteenth century. They both occurred after the 1850s and consist of the British perception of Japan and Britain's changing attitude towards its colonies and colonized peoples. Indeed,

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[38] Thomas Allom, *China: the Scenery, Architecture, and Social Habits of that Ancient Empire* (London: Carlsruhe, 1844).

after the initial years of the Victorian era, a change of direction took place in Britain's imperial attitude towards Asian countries. This caused a social rift in the traditionally unified perception of otherness. In the early months of 1839 when Britain made the decision to embark on the first Opium War with China, the profit from British merchants trading in the Far-East region amounted to approximately 34 million Mexican silver dollars per annum. Fearing that the outbreak of war might cause long term harm to what was obviously a very profitable trade for the empire, Japan was chosen as the instrument of a propaganda war, and was promoted among the Victorian public as an image of a 'more pleasurable meeting with another country in the Far East'.[39] The aim of such statements is to nullify the Victorians' fear of war by presenting Japan as the image of an ideal and peaceful Orient (as well as to justify their war against China by casting China as the degenerate East needing discipline, in contrast to Japan – an advanced Eastern country). For example, in 1852 Alexander Andrew Knox was able to boldly declare in the *Edinburgh Review* the 'unquestionable' superiority of Japanese culture over the rest of the Orient. Not only does he consider the Chinese, 'not without reason, to be an inferior race',[40] but he further announces that:

> We refuse to accept the architectural monuments of India as tests of civilization. They are proofs of superstition and slavery – nothing more.[41]

The deliberate intention of Knox to raise the respectability of the Japanese, while at the same time dismissing the virtue of the rest of the Orient, is obvious in this

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[39] Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation 1850-80* (London: MacMillan, 1987), p. 1.
[40] Alexander Andrew Knox, 'Japan', *Edinburgh Review*, 96 (1852), 348-383, p. 355.
[41] Ibid., p. 351.

article. But he was not the only writer at the time to do so. In Henry Morley's 1851 article for *Household Words* entitled 'Our Phantom Ship: Japan', Japan was once again presented in a favourable light that is unlike the conventional barbarism of China and India. Not only did the imaginary traveller encounter in Japan what he happily termed an 'acute race', but the 'original and thinking minds' of the people was also highly recommended in the article.[42] Such works show that not only was public interest in Japan during the early 1850s uncannily strong, but more importantly, unlike China and India, readers and the public somehow expected from Japan an image that has never been bestowed on the Orient before – an image that is positive and pleasant.

In the meantime, publishing firms such as Blackwood's also made use of this propaganda agenda, by capitalising on their readers' sudden interest in Japan. Many books and articles concerning Japan were, as a result, published between 1850-1859.[43] For instance, when Captain Sherard Osborn wrote to John Blackwood stating his intention to write an article on his upcoming trip to Japan, he received a prompt and uncharacteristically enthusiastic reply saying: 'I expect great pleasure from your sketch of that wondrous country where I hope you landed [and] saw as much as time would permit.'[44] Osborn's book – *A Cruise in Japanese Waters* (1859) – would turn out to be a best seller that duly heeded Blackwood's 'prediction' in offering an account of a 'wondrous' country that gives 'pleasure'. However, it also demonstrates what the readers' expectations were at the time, and Blackwood, being a good entrepreneur, understood and expected collaboration on this from his writers. When Laurence Oliphant returned to England from his Far East duty with Lord Elgin, and sent his journal to

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[42] Henry Morley, 'Our Phantom Ship: Japan', *Household Words*, 3 (1851), 160-167, p. 167.
[43] See Yokoyama, *Japan*.
[44] 'Blackwood to Osborn, 30 Nov 1858' NLS, The Blackwood Papers, Acc. 5643, D2, 389-390.

Blackwood to consult about its publication, in one of the correspondences that follows the editor tentatively requested Oliphant to add something about a traditional Chinese prison. To this Oliphant's answer was a firm 'no', and he even expressed doubt concerning the widespread rumour that such a prison exists. He wrote to Blackwood stating that not only was he not present when Lord Elgin allegedly discovered one such horrible establishment in China, but he was 'astounded' by 'Cooke's highly embellished [...] account some months afterwards'.[45] The strange fact regarding Blackwood's action was that, at that time, Oliphant had already established a strong reputation as a writer of factual travel books (He also wrote *A Journey to Khatmandu* [1852], *The Russian Shores of the Black Sea in the Autumn of 1852* [1853], and *Minnesota and the Far West* [1855]), and according to John Sutherland's description of the two men's 'lifelong association',[46] Blackwood should have known better than anyone that Oliphant was not a person to write fictional accounts on anyone's behalf. The only explanation that can be given for Blackwood's suggestion is that the publisher was prompted by what was obviously a very one-sided readership demand at the time, and that demand is not so much related to facts or the truth, but their expectation of a 'moral' Japan and an 'immoral' China and India.[47] Indeed, the vast amount of travel literature on this subject during the 1850s reveals this distinct public preference for an image of 'good Japan', along with the traditional 'bad India and China'.[48]

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[45] 'Oliphant to Blackwood', NLS, BP, MS 4141, f. 192.

[46] John Sutherland, *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 475.

[47] The vilifying of India during the mid-nineteenth century has already been richly documented by numerous scholarship studies and hence warrants no repetition here. For more information, please refer to Jeffery Meyers, *Fiction and the Colonial Experience* (Ipswich: Boydell, 1972) and K. C. Belliappa, *The Image of India in the English Fiction* (New Delhi: D. K. Publishers, 1991).

[48] For more examples of this, please refer to William Gerald Beasley, *Great Britain and the*

Although there may have been strong political reasons behind the Victorians' desire to establish an image of a positive Japan, to their understanding of otherness, it is irreversibly damaging. As stated earlier, in terms of the formation of Victorian cultural identity, otherness works only as long as there is a unified belief in the East being a place of vileness and decadence. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, with the sudden emergence of Japan as a moralistic and pleasant nation in the Orient, the concept of otherness has suddenly lost its footing which consists of the belief that: 'Britain is not the Orient, hence they are not vile like the Orientals, hence they must be lawful and moralistic'. And as the image of the East as a unified whole was disintegrating, other political issues concerning the British empire were forcing the Victorians to further question the propriety of otherness, which is reflected in their traditional perception of the East (or more broadly the non-West) and their subjugation of the people of the East (or more inclusively the non-Western 'other').

III. The Reconfiguration of Victorian Otherness and its Consequences

From my argument above, it is clear that during the middle of the nineteenth century, changes had undeniably taken place through which the Victorian perception of the East was no longer as vile as it once was. Between the observations of Harry Parkes during the 1840s and the apparent popularity of Oriental art objects in the 50s, nobody can deny the fact that society's attitude in general had been different. This, in terms of the concept of otherness being an

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Opening of Japan, 1834-1858 (London: Luzac & Co., 1951); Edward Vivian Gatenby, 'The Influence of Japan on English Language and Literature', *Transaction and Proceedings of Japan Society*, 34 (1936-1937), 37-64; and Yokoyama, *Japan*.

institutional form, would have exactly the same effect on Victorian cultural identity as the reconfiguration of the notions of religion, duty, and domesticity. In this section, I will examine the various implication of the reconfiguration of otherness as an institutional form, in particular in its apparent and dramatic loss of meaning after the 1850s when it detaches itself from the notion of Orientalism, and its consequence to the definition of Victorian cultural identity.

During the 1850s, there are strong indications that the reconfiguration of otherness is taking place, forcing a general contemplation of conventional Victorian cultural identity. During this time, aside from textual evidences, the public's fascination (instead of hostility) towards Oriental objects would also begin to cement itself in Victorian society in the form of Oriental architecture. This is important because not only do buildings command visual attention, making them hard to ignore, but furthermore, when compared to printed texts or Oriental mementos, they are also much more accessible to the working class, thus making them more significant in the shaping of Victorian cultural ideas. During the first half of the century, there are very few structures in Britain that contain an Oriental exterior, with the Brighton Pavilion and Samuel Pepys Cockerell's Sezincote House being of the most renowned among a dozen or so other buildings. Interestingly, however, this does not mean house owners were not fascinated by Oriental aesthetic at the time, because as Mark Crinson points out, since the turn of the century, the Oriental style was actually a surprisingly fashionable and common feature for interior decorations among aristocratic country houses.[49] This is interesting because it signifies a precise longing for what the Orient had to offer, but it also shows the mentality of the time to be that few were willing to

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[49] See Mark Crinson, *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* (Routledge: London, 1996).

admit it. Placing this within the context of otherness, it demonstrates how this institutional form is able to maintain its strong presence in society's mentality, in the feeling that a desire for Oriental decorations must be kept hidden for fear of contradiction to one's cultural identity. Because, given the precarious status symbolised by a Victorian home (see Chapter 3), this kind of sentiment can be understood in the sense that having an Oriental façade runs certain risks of the house owner being perceived as immoral, since the common Victorian belief is that a home reflects the owner's character and the Orient represents immorality and vileness. However, after the 1850s, a new sentiment towards Oriental aesthetic would emerge to displace the old one, and more and more buildings were erected with a prominent Oriental exterior. The Royal Panopticon of Leicester Square in 1854, and the Turkish Baths at Jermyn Street in London, which was completed in 1862, are good examples which reflect this changing social attitude. The parallel between this emergence of Oriental architecture and the sensation novels which were discussed in the previous chapter is uncanny. For example, we have seen how sensation novels serve as a medium that reveals the dark elements of society that had always existed but had been ignored, a similarity can be found in Oriental architecture in the sense that it is simply revealing to the public the inner desire of home owners that had previously been confined to the interiors of buildings. Furthermore, like sensation novels, Oriental architecture was also regarded at the time by cultural critics as a threat to the Victorian morality and identity, and was attacked accordingly by conservatives who hoped to preserve their conventional ideal of moralistic nineteenth century Britishness. John Ruskin, one of the most outspoken individuals against the 'corruption' of sensation novels, was equally fierce in his attack on Oriental architecture. In a lecture given in the late 1850s, he states:

> All ornamentation of that lower kind is pre-eminently the gift of cruel persons, of Indians, Saracens, Byzantines, and is the delight of the worst and cruellest nations, Moorish, Indian, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, and so on [...] The fancy and delicacy of eye in interweaving lines and arranging colours – mere lines and colour, of ignorance and cruelty, belonging to men as spots to the tiger or hues to the snake.[50]

To someone like Ruskin, not only are Oriental architecture and aesthetic objects ugly to behold, but they also represent a serious threat to the 'purity' of conventional Victorian cultural identity. In works such as *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1853), Ruskin reiterates over and over again the importance of traditional English architecture, which he saw as the natural successor of the Venetian masters, in the sense that it offers the nation a sense of glorified identity, heritage, and culture. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, for example, he compares the cultural importance of such a 'style' to that of a child learning Latin, in that:

> So, when a boy is first taught to write Latin, an authority is required of him for every expression he uses; as he becomes master of the language he may take a license, and feel his right to do so without any authority, and yet write better Latin than when he borrowed every expression. In the same way our architects would have to be taught to write the accepted style.[51]

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[50] Ruskin, *Works*, XVI, p. 307.
[51] Ibid., VIII, p. 257.

According to Ruskin, the architectural style of a society carries the same cultural implication as its language in the sense that it provides the most common denominator for a culture to communicate with itself (whether via speech or visual effects), which in turn allows itself to form a unified identity. To forsake an existing architectural style in favour of another, thus, carries the same implication as abandoning one's language, which signifies the separation of one from one's identity and culture. Ruskin's attack on Oriental architecture, therefore, represents his desire to return to the conventional value of Victorian cultural identity in what he perceives as its 'pure' form. To him, not only does the Oriental aesthetic influence signify 'impurity', but it also poses a threat to the moralistic middle-class image of Victorian cultural identity by threatening it with Eastern characteristics that are perceived by conventionality as vulgar, immoral, and 'cruel'.[52]

However, despite Ruskin's warning, the English fascination with Oriental art and aesthetics gained progressive momentum throughout the century. For example, after the sack of Beijing in 1860, even Lord Elgin, who is second to none in the embracement of the belief in English cultural superiority, expressed remorse for the destruction of so many Chinese aesthetic objects. For example, he once lamented at a dinner party that:

> No one regretted more sincerely than I did the destruction of that collection of summer houses and kiosks dignified by the title of Summer Palace of the Chinese Emperor [...] I am disposed to believe that under this mass of abortions and rubbish there lie some hidden sparks of a divine fire, which the genius of my

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[52] For more information on Ruskin's view regarding Oriental influence on English architecture, see John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

countrymen may gather and nurse into a flame.[53]

Indeed, public acceptance of Oriental aesthetic was at such a height during the time that Indian Shawls, Chinoiserie, as well as Japonesque vases and other items had all become common household objects in an English home. At the same time, Oriental architecture also blossomed into a fashionable trend that successfully made the transition from interior decorations to the exteriors of buildings. Under these circumstances, it would have been impossible for even Lord Elgin to deny the aesthetic value of Chinese arts, especially in a setting like the Royal Academy where he was surrounded by middle-class patrons responsible for the popularity of the Oriental aesthetic in the first place. However, Elgin's reluctance to praise the Chinese is clear in his emphasis that it would ultimately still require a 'countrymen' of his to forge Oriental arts into something worthwhile. By doing so, he was able to preserve the dignity of Victorian cultural identity in accordance to a conventionalist's perspective.

However, despite the objection to the Oriental aesthetic offered by Ruskin, Elgin, and T. Roger Smith, who advocates that 'the right thing in designing and executing our buildings is that they should be English',[54] the Victorian 'craze' for Oriental visual displays would continue to gain popularity with the Victorian middle-class. There are also others who openly embrace this new trend. For example, the painter Delacroix believes that 'the most beautiful pictures I have seen are certain Persian carpets'.[55] There are also appreciators like Charles Eastlake and Christopher Dresser who dedicate volumes of work such as *Hints on*

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[53] Hanes, p. 11-12.

[54] T. Roger Smith, 'Architectural Art in India', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 21 (1873), 280-299 (p. 282).

[55] John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 288.

Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details (1868) and *Principles of Decorative Design* (1873) to the praise of Oriental aesthetic. Dresser, for example, believes that Oriental decorations are able to achieve the 'perfect marvels of colour-harmony' and have the 'effect of a garden full of flowers, or better, of the slope of a Swiss alp, where the flowers combine to form one vast harmonious "glow" of colour', which is unknown in English art due to the 'want of judgement in the manufacturer' and 'want of taste on the part of the consumer'.[56]

However, whether it is the conventionalists' attack on Oriental aesthetic, or the advocates' support for it, they importantly outline the cultural debate of the time by providing a valuable historical perspective on otherness. The feelings from both parties have not so much to do with the dictation of personal taste, but interestingly reveal a tendency to associate their choice with their sense of nationality and cultural identity. While the conventionalists tend to view this influx of Oriental taste as a terrible 'threat' to their conventional cultural identity (Ruskin, as we have seen, believes art to be an important foundation to his cultural identity), its advocates believe the Oriental aesthetic could actually enhance Englishness by introducing into it beneficial elements that are previously missing in English art. What they did not realise, however, is that Oriental decoration is not a newly introduced element to society in the 1850s, but represents a previously hidden desire of the Victorian middle-class who were formerly afraid to disclose it for fear of being perceived as immoral. Thus, like sensation novels, it would be wrong to interpret it as an external element of chaos threatening to contaminate Victorian cultural identity from the outside, because it represents

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[56] Christopher Dresser, *Principles of Decorative Design* (London: Cassell Petter and Galpin, 1873), pp. 94-106.

simply the revelation of a previously hidden aspect of Victorian society in popular internal decorations, which reveals the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity to be a dilemma that is manifested from its original conceptualisation, rather than any outside 'threats'.

Orientalism, as I have discussed in this chapter, has an important symbolic function in confirming the morality of Victorian cultural identity. However, the popularity enjoyed by Eastern art during the 1850s foretold the fact that society is no longer capable of dismissing all Eastern objects and ideas as simply and straightforwardly vile. The result is that the sense of unquestioned morality that has traditionally been synonymous with the identity of Britishness, is progressively losing its meaning. To a conservative like Ruskin, this 'dilution' of otherness undoubtedly poses a threat to the notion of conventional Victorian cultural identity. It is a view that is supported by Matthew Arnold, who in 'Heine's Grave' blames his perceived loss of cultural identity on the contemporary influx of Eastern ideas into Victorian society. He writes:

> Shakespeare! loveliest of souls,
>
> Peerless in radiance, in joy.
>
> What, then, so harsh and malign,
>
> Heine! distils from thy life?
>
> Poisons the peace of the grave?
>
> I chide with thee not, that thy sharp
>
> Upbraidings often assail'd
>
> England, my country – for we,

Heavy and sad, for her sons,

Long since, deep in our hearts,

Echo the blame of her foes.

[…]

Scarce comprehending the voice

Of her greatest, golden-mouth'd sons

Of a former age any more –

Stupidly travels her round.[57]

In the first few lines, the grief for what the poet perceives as the loss of his cultural value is made obvious in his metaphorical comparison of Heine to 'England, my country', which he effectively pronounced dead with the mention of its 'grave'. The allusion to that 'death' in regard to cultural identity is also made obvious by his mention of Shakespeare who, in accordance with Thomas Arnold's middle-class cultural ideology, is representative of Arnold's view regarding his cultural heritage. However, in relation to the question of cultural identity, the most significant aspect of the poem lies in its perception that conventional Victorian cultural identity is lost because it has been corrupted from the inside by a 'poisoner', which the poet further elaborates by suggesting the presence of the 'foes' to be 'deep inside' the 'hearts' of the 'sons' of England. Although Arnold does not state in this particular poem the exact nature of these 'foes', given the fact that society was concurrently experiencing a reformulation of the institutional form of otherness, as well as Arnold's own animosity towards the trend of 'Orientalisation' (see my analysis of Arnold in the next chapter), the accusation of the corruption of England by 'foes' (otherness) from within clearly suggests a

[57] Matthew Arnold, 'Heine's Grave', 65-75, 78-81.

parallel to the contemporary inclination of incorporating Oriental objects into Victorian society – such as the construction of Oriental style buildings on English soil. The most important thing, however, is that both Ruskin and Arnold see this assimilation of Oriental ideas into Victorian society as a threat to their perceived cultural identity. This means the implication of otherness as an institutional form to Victorian cultural identity is at the very least recognisable to some Victorian intellectuals. It is important for us to be mindful of this because it demonstrates a direct link between the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity and the apparent popularity of Oriental ideas after 1850. The result of this is not so different from the crisis of faith or duty suffered by the Victorians during this same period, which directly prompts the Victorians to reconsider their conventional identity based on these very values that are currently being exposed to doubts and scrutiny. The outcome, as I will explore in the next chapter, is that of the total reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity which forever separates the pre-1850 generation from the decadents.

IV. Empire and Victorian Cultural Identity

Aside from the influence from the East in architecture and arts, the continual expansion of British imperialism also contributes heavily to the reformation of the middle-class interpretation of otherness during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, Henry George Grey, Colonial Secretary from 1846-1852, believes that:

> [B]y the acquisition of its Colonial dominions, the Nation has incurred a

responsibility of the highest kind, which it is not at liberty to throw off. The authority of the British Crown is at this moment the most powerful instrument, under Providence, of maintaining peace and order in many extensive regions of the earth, and thereby assists in diffusing amongst millions of the human race, the blessings of Christianity and civilization.[58]

And similarly, in the 'Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonisation from Ireland, together with Minutes of Evidence, 1847' published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1850, it was stated that:

> It is a noble work to plant the foot of England and extend her sceptre by the banks of streams unnamed, and over regions yet unknown – and to conquer, not by tyrannous subjugation of inferior races, but by the victories of mind over brute matter and blind mechanical obstacles. A yet nobler work it is to diffuse over a new created world the laws of Alfred, the language of Shakespeare, and the Christian religion, the last great heritage of man.[59]

From these two passages, it is clear that during the 1850s when the spirit of imperialism was in its heyday, the question regarding the Empire's colonial policy was very much a cultural one. British subjects, it is observed, have a tendency to regard themselves as in an elevated position, so that the *laws of Alfred*, *the language of Shakespeare*, and *the Christian religion* – elements that are traditionally associated with the ideology of an English middle-class culture – are

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[58] Henry George Grey, *Review of "The Colonial Policy of Lord J. Russell's Administration"* (London: Edward Stanford, 1853), p. 14.

[59] 'Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonisation from Ireland, together with Minutes of Evidence, 1847', *Edinburgh Review*, 41 (1849-50), 1-62 (p. 61).

believed to be superior to anything that can be found in the colonies. The cultivation of *inferior races* by these middle-class values is as a result regarded as *a responsibility of the highest kind.* At the time, beliefs as such represent a fundamental principle that guides the government's colonial policy. The popular manifestation of this principle is that the acquisition of colonies is not necessarily for the benefit of Britain, but for the well-being of the colonies, in the sense that they now have the chance to be 'Anglicised' by a superior, moralistic, and cultivated culture. Indeed, since the previous century, British Empire builders had been working with the presumption that it is their duty to try to cultivate inferior cultures by imposing onto them English cultural values and ideologies. For example, Macaulay believes that the higher aim of colonisation is to produce a population of subjects who are 'English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'.[60] Queen Victoria's title of the Empress of India is a further attestation to this view. However, despite its aim of Anglicising the colonial races, such a process of assimilation brought instead trouble to conventional Victorian cultural identity, which basically forces society to confront its perception of its cultural identity, and what Britishness in fact signifies.

In 1865, news from Jamaica arrived that a massive insurrection had taken place which, were it not for the 'bravery' of one Governor Eyre, would surely have turned into a more terrible affair than the Indian Mutiny. The initial gossip concerns mainly the terrible deeds and savageries committed by the natives, alongside praises for the actions taken by Governor Eyre. However, while the news of its containment was soothing to the English aristocracy and middle class, the incident was told in a drastically different perspective by some American

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[60] Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Selected Writings*, ed. John Clive & Thomas Pinney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 249.

newspapers. For example, one of the earliest headlines for the story reads 'Eight Miles of Dead Bodies'.[61] There are also numerous reports of the actions taken by British soldiers which, by comparison, render the atrocious proceedings of the natives insignificant. Indeed, historical records show that the scale of massacre committed by British officials in the aftermath of the 'rebellion' is many times more hideous and cruel than the original act by the locals. Lieutenant Adcock, who participated in the event, reputedly reported that:

> I visited several estates and villages. I burnt seven houses in all, but did not even see a rebel. On returning to the Golden Grove in the evening, sixty-seven prisoners had been sent in... I disposed of as many as possible, but was too tired to continue after dark...[62]

Other eyewitnesses' accounts were equally horrifying. When news of the British officers' cruelty finally reached London, large scaled protests broke out and a large population of the English working-class literally demanded Eyre to be brought to trial for his 'crime against humanity.' The irony, however, is that when this happened Eyre was concurrently being saluted by the middle-class as a national hero. This split of public opinion would be epitomised during the evening of August 21, 1866, when the ship carrying Eyre from Jamaica docked at Southampton and a banquet was held in Philharmonic Hall in his honour. As the dinner party was taking place, a mounting number of protestors gathered outside the Hall and eventually erupted into a riot that brought terrible chaos and destruction. But all of this was just the beginning of a series of incidents that

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[61] *New York Herald*, Oct 1865. Quoted in Bernard Semmel, *The Governor Eyre Controversy* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1962), p. 15.

[62] Semmel, p. 17. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

would eventually force the Victorians to confront the issue of otherness and cultural identity. As stated earlier, the notion of otherness is an essential part of Victorian cultural identity that helps unify a culture and gives it a solid sense of self-definition in a globalising world. What the Eyre affair demonstrates is a change in this, because the workers' anger towards the governor clearly illustrates the fact that their sense of self-identification is no longer with the middle-class Victorians who were feasting inside Philharmonic Hall (as Victorian cultural identity dictates), but the colonised Jamaicans. Clearly, when an entire class balks against a cultural institution in this scale, Victorian cultural identity is having a problem.

However, tempting as it may be to interpret this issue as class struggle, it is wrong because the problem actually extends deeper than that. Before Eyre even arrived in England, the struggle between conventional Victorian cultural identity in respect to otherness and the public's interpretation of this was already manifesting in society. Months before the Southampton riot, when Mary Eyre, the governor's sister, wrote to the *Morning Star* to defend the action of her brother, she received a caustic reply:

> You have done a smart thing, no doubt, trying to defend your bloody, murderous brother, who deserves a rope if ever anyone did [...] A greater scoundrel never walked the earth, and to help him he got the blood of Nelson and others to work and 'rum'd' the sailors that they might cut up the poor, because they are *black* and *coloured*.[63]

This letter marks the beginning of an open newspaper war that sees sides either

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[63] Ibid., p. 25. My Italics.

approving of or denouncing Edward Eyre. While most of writings tend to concern more passion than facts, they are importantly united by a central question of race, culture, and Britishness. For example, in one of these letters, someone who calls himself 'A White Man' states:

> I venture to appeal to you for some sympathy with white men. At present the Wesleyans seem bent on exterminating people who have the misfortune to be born white. Last night, at Exeter Hall, the onslaught on us poor whites was terrible.[64]

In letters as such, whether the sympathy is being demonstrated towards the 'black and coloured' or the 'whites', the focus of the debate clearly concerns whether a native of Jamaica should be considered a British citizen (Jamaica being a British colony) or, to put it simply, whether citizenship alone is enough to define Victorian cultural identity. In other words, the significance of the Eyre Affair is that it basically forces the nation to confront the cultural implication of Imperialism in relation to otherness. If the aim of imperialism and colonisation is to cultivate and Anglicise the 'lower' races, then after that, what becomes of those Anglicised natives? Do they become Victorians? It is questions regarding Victorian cultural identity as such that the British public is now required to confront.

The sympathies shown towards the Jamaicans by the English working-class, whose position was also supported by the likes of J. S. Mill, Charles Buxton, Lyell, Darwin, as well as Huxley, along with the anonymous writers of the two previously quoted letters, are demonstrative of the fact that during the 1860s, the middle-class definition of Englishness according to otherness, is experiencing

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[64] Ibid., p. 26.

stress and uncertainties. No longer does the notion of the 'vile other' constitute an automatic reflection of moralistic Englishness; in fact, if the Eyre Affair has illustratively proven anything, it is the disillusionment with the mythological middle-class definition of Victorian cultural identity.

However, as with debates concerning all other institutional forms, conservative middle-class sentiment in this case is equally strong especially in the interpretation of colonial subjects and Victorian cultural identity. John Tyndall, for instance, states in 1867 that:

> I decline accepting the Negro as the equal of the Englishman, nor will I commit myself to the position that a Negro and an English insurrection ought to be treated in the same way [...] We do not hold an Englishman and a Jamaica Negro to be convertible terms, nor do we think that the cause of human liberty will be promoted by any attempt to make them so.[65]

What today would have been regarded as racist slurs, back in the 1860s, actually summarise the belief of the English middle-class pretty well. What Tyndall is saying is this: regardless of all the outward propaganda regarding colonialism, when it comes to the root of Victorian cultural identity, it is always the essence of the middle-class institutional forms that counts. The question is that if, because of the Empire, the Jamaicans, who are traditionally regarded as a 'lower race' and represent the 'immoral other', are to be considered British and to be given equal rights, then what would happen to the 'moralistic' and 'white' Victorians who reside in England? Tyndall, of course, refuses to allow that. But the important fact is that his comment is unmistakably directed at the dilemma concerning the

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[65] Ibid., p. 125.

original justification of colonialism, and its manifested problem which concerns the cultural identity of the natives and otherness. The doubt suffered by the Victorians regarding otherness as an institutional form is clearly identifiable.

When the government finally made up its mind to bring Eyre to trial in 1866, questions as such concerning otherness would predominantly loom in the back of the people's mind. The result of this is the rapid appearance of a number of writings that aim precisely at defining for the public the concept of Englishness. Charles Dilke, for example, believes fiercely in *Greater Britain* (1868) that the true quality of Englishness lies in the heritage of the 'race', and the 'dark-skinned races of the world' should only be only considered as subsidiaries of the Empire and only the true English should have the responsibility of the 'moral dictatorship of the globe, by ruling mankind through Saxon institutions and the English tongue.'[66] Similarly, Edward Freeman, in *The Growth of the English Constitution* (1876), tries to maintain the principle of a racial superiority in Victorian cultural identity, by arguing that the 'Teutonic essence' is the very nature of the English's 'unbroken national being'.[67] Writings as such not only demonstrate the conventionalists' sense of urgency to establish English cultural identity as something that is 'pure' and uncontaminated by foreign influences, but also betray the problem caused to Victorian cultural identity by otherness, highlighting the intangibility of Victorian cultural identity which had existed since the very beginning.

The Eyre controversy marks an important point in the cultural debate of the 1860s and 70s, where questions concerning Victorian cultural identity are raised through the institutional form of otherness. On one side of this argument, the

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[66] Charles W. Dilke, *Greater Britain* (London: MacMillan, 1868), II, p. 40.
[67] Edward A. Freeman, *The Growth of the English Constitution* (London: MacMillan, 1876), pp. 22-23.

Victorian working class demonstrate their disillusionment with the conventional Arnoldian definition of cultural identity, and sees their own place within their contemporary social structure as one that relates more to their status within an industrialised world, rather than a presupposed set of class values that seems unreliable (hence their sympathies for the Jamaican working class, with whom they share a position in the industrialised world, rather than the English middle-class to whom they can relate in the mythologised name of 'Englishness' only). On the other side, there are the conventionalists who wanted to restore Victorian cultural identity to its middle-class roots. Not surprisingly, among the list of prominent Victorians who openly support Eyre, one finds familiar names such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, and Tennyson, whose interest in preserving their sense of conventional middle-class morality has already been discussed in the previous chapters.

During the second half of the Victorian era, among other things, cultural controversies such as the Eyre Affair, which were brought about by the expansion of the Empire, represent one of the main reasons for the contemporary uncertainty about otherness, which in turns complicates the shifting perception of Victorian cultural identity. The emergence of this mixed attitude towards otherness is also evident in the literature of the 1860s and 70s, just before the manifestation of the decadence phenomenon. For example, it is no coincidence that novels such as Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), concurrently portray Jewish characters in an untraditionally moralistic light. Indeed, ever since Jews resided in Britain, the traditional image of the Jew in English literature has always been one of cold-blooded moneylenders or merchants who brutalise and mistreat the poor citizens of England. There may have been rare exceptions every now and then (such as Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*), but

overall, this image of the evil Jew is one that is well established in English literary culture. However, in *Our Mutual Friend*, between the characters of Mr. Fledgeby and Riah, readers were able to observe a cleverly reversed role between the Christian and the Jew, in the sense that it was the scheming, ruthless Christian who gives the order to 'go on squeezing those Christians',[68] and the helpless Jew who has 'no motive but to help the helpless' (429). In the scene that portrays Lizzie in distress, with both Riah and Eugene Wrayburn present to help her, readers would expect an Arthurian ending and see the damsel (a Christian woman) rescued by her hero (a Christian man). However, the maiden instead 'drew closer to the Jew, and bent her head' (404). There is no doubt that Dickens is intentionally raising the status of the Jew to the same level as the chivalrous Christian. Furthermore, through the mouth of Riah, Dickens proclaims towards the end of the novel that:

> [People] take the worst of us as samples of the best; they take the lowest of us as presentations of the highest; and they say 'All Jews are alike.' If, doing what I was content to do here, because I was grateful for the past and have small need of money now, I had been a Christian, I could have done it, compromising no one but my individual self. But doing it as a Jew, I could not choose but compromise the Jews of all conditions and all countries. It is a little hard upon us, but it is the truth. (726)

In English history prior to the Victorian period, the Jew is undoubtedly a misunderstood race. Through *Our Mutual Friend*, therefore, what Dickens was hoping to achieve was to awaken the consciousness of the public in regard to this

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[68] Dickens, *Friend*, p. 428. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

issue, and bring awareness to the fact that a Jew and a Christian are, after all, not so different from each other. Christians are perfectly capable of evil acts, just as to Riah, 'it is the custom of our people to help' (728).

The interesting thing, however, is that this kind of open-minded attitude does not always occur in the novels of Dickens. In *Oliver Twist*, for example, Fagin the Jew not only lives up to the reputation of being wicked and unpleasant, but probably even exceeds that. The portrayal of Riah is therefore doubly significant because it shows not only that the traditional prejudice of otherness is fading in society, but also pinpoints the time of its occurrence to be sometime between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*, which fits in with my argument that the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity happened during the same time. It, furthermore, represents an important step for society in trying to release a foreign race from a previously biased image. This is also noteworthy because, less than ten years ago, the Indian Mutiny took place which brought the Victorians' distrust of Oriental races to a boiling point. The reaction from Richard Cobden, a member of the House of Commons at the time, sums up the contemporary feelings to be:

> "This crisis in the East... makes me very grateful for the accident... for the more I reflect on it, the less do I feel able to take any part which would harmonize with the views and prejudices of the British publics."
>
> "Unfortunately for me I can't even co-operate with those who seek to 'reform' India, for I have no faith in the power of England to govern that country at all permanently... If the House of Commons were to renounce all responsibility for domestic legislation, and give itself exclusively to the task of governing one hundred millions of Asiatics, it would fail. Hindoostan must be ruled by those who

live on that side of the globe."[69]

At the time, the general feeling towards India, and in fact the Orient as a whole, was one of such disgust and mistrust that the task of reforming such people was generally believed to be a hopeless one. However, although this feeling of mistrust persisted, at the same time there also arose the question which suggested that perhaps the British *did not* understand India as well as they had previously thought. The British had, for years, believed India to be a land firmly under control and that both parties were extremely happy and satisfied. A revolt was the last thing which they expected to happen. So between what they believed in their mind and reality something must be missing. This prompted a reawakened interest in the study of India and what they found was that the locals were far from happy. John Bright, also a member of the House of Common, declared after his investigation on the condition of India that:

"What is it that the people of India, if they spoke by my mouth, have to complain of? They would tell the House that, as a rule, throughout almost all the Presidencies... the cultivators of the soil, the great body of the population of India, are in a condition of great impoverishment, of great dejection, and of great suffering... I would say that the taxes of India are more onerous and oppressive than the taxes of any other country in the world... I would show that industry is neglected by the Government to a greater extent probably than is the case in any other country in the world which has been for any length of time under what is termed a civilized and Christian Government... I would say that the real activity of

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[69] Quoted in Reginald Reynolds, *The White Sahibs in India* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1937), pp. 83-84.

> the Indian Government has been an activity of conquest and annexation – of conquest and annexation which after a time has led to a fearful catastrophe which has enforced on the House an attention to the question of India, which but for that catastrophe I fear the House would not have given it...'[70]

Because of individuals like John Bright, whose effort received a further boost from Disraeli's endorsement of bringing 'the colonies into constant and continuous relations with the Home Government',[71] the Victorian public eventually was able to gain a better and deeper understanding of the East. It is under this kind of atmosphere that George Eliot continues the effort of Dickens to emancipate the Victorians from their confinement of otherness in *Daniel Deronda.* Whereas the main theme of *Our Mutual Friend* is centred upon the promotion of equality in general,[72] in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot seems keen on expanding this idea to include the exploration of the relationship between otherness and the image of the Jew. Deronda's mother, for example, represents the conventional institutional form of otherness who feels nothing but shame about her Jewish heritage. However, Eliot masterfully counteracts this by presenting Deronda as a representation of open-mindedness of the new generation, who declares: 'What I have been most trying to do for fifteen years is to have some understanding of those who differ from myself.'[73] In other words, Eliot once again not only tackles the contemporary social issue of otherness in typical fashion, but she further follows up the debate by pointing out the interdependency of Victorian cultural

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[70] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

[71] Benjamin Disraeli, 'Speech at Crystal Palace', 1872.

[72] Besides the idea of Jews being of an equal statue to the white men, in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens also seem to be concerned about the idea of equality between classes, as was seen in the unlikely romance between Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam, which was proclaimed that with love there is no 'unsuitability'.

[73] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 540.

identity and otherness, and meticulously shifted the nature of her argument to the 'understanding of those who differ from' the Jews – the Victorians.

If Dickens and Eliot represent the responsible parties for the dismantling of the traditional definition of otherness, then on the opposite side, Matthew Arnold stands as the champion of the middle-class who espouses the conventional view of Eastern inferiority. His essay *Culture and Anarchy* marks an important study on this subject – the focal point of which being to confirm Victorian cultural identity by praising what Arnold believes to be important Western virtues. The basic argument used by Arnold surrounds the twin middle-class ideals of Hebraism and Hellenism, which stress that the 'governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience.'[74] He then emphasises that culture can only be achieved when the two qualities are in equilibrium. Although at first glance, the inclusion of Hebraism may appear contradictory to his interest in conventional Victorian cultural identity, he counteracts this by confining its usage to a narrow, religious context, which corresponds to his approval of its 'strictness of conscience'. By doing so, Arnold is basically responding to otherness and the Oriental fascination of the time by reinterpreting them in a conventional Arnoldian point of view, in the sense that the amalgamation of Oriental ideas into Victorian identity is acceptable as long as they adhere to society's existing middle-class principles, such as Hebraic (Victorian) Christianity and Hellenistic (Victorian) aesthetic.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the problem of otherness during the 1850s and 60s, along with its consequence in the form of society's identification with Victorian cultural identity. The growing popularity of Oriental arts and

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[74] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 128.

Britain's expanding colonies are two key areas where the conventional interpretation of otherness experienced anxiety. The problem occurred because otherness traditionally relies on Orientalism, which dictates the Oriental entity to be uniformly immoral and decadent; therefore when Oriental aesthetics become respectable and Oriental nations become diverse, the effect of having an immoral other to illustrate the morality of the self is suddenly nullified. The *fin de siècle*, in many ways, is reflective of this because many of the elements which are previously associated with the Orient (such as immorality, sexual licentiousness, and barbarism), are now being openly attributed to different aspects of Victorian society, demonstrating the extent which otherness and Victorian cultural identity had been reconfigured in the mind of the Victorian public.

5. CRISIS

In the previous chapters, I argued how the public's conceptualisation of the four institutional forms – religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness – simultaneously experienced problems from the 1850s. This leads to the inevitable reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity in its conventional sense (as exemplified by Thomas Arnold's teaching based on these specific doctrines). Although this does not imply the end of Victorian cultural identity and its traditionally self-conceived image of absolute morality, the fact is that it no longer retains the same power to appeal to society as a legitimate representation of their culture. Having already demonstrated how this attitude emerged and the cultural debate that ensues, I now turn my attention to the implication of this reconfiguration – the mid-Victorian identity crisis.

Towards the end of the 1860s, the cultural atmosphere reflected in literature differs greatly from that of Thomas Arnold's generation. It reflects a sense of liberation as the Victorians were able to perceive themselves freed from their traditional, rigid and systematic cultural identity. As a result, alternative publications suddenly appeared on the scene with the deliberate aim of portraying society in an unconventionally immoral light, which fundamentally and unmistakably opposes the high-moralism of conventional Victorian cultural identity. The fact that poets such as Swinburne were able to gather popularity by doing so, demonstrates society's recognition of the changing values of their contemporary culture. But on the opposite side, there are also strong indications of a sense of uneasiness towards this newfound freedom (or lack of direction), which can be perceived in the equally popular genre of nostalgic literature about moralistic Britain. This type of discrepancy of literary taste highlights the cultural dilemma which occurred as a post-1870 aftermath of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. In this chapter, I will examine the

manifestation of this reconfiguration of cultural identity in late-Victorian literature, and discuss how this cultural dilemma would eventually reconfigure Englishness into the highly immoral and 'non-Victorian' decadence. I will do this by first looking at some of the early indications of the reconfiguration of conventional Victorian cultural identity, and establish its connection to the disillusionment of the four institutional forms I have identified in the previous chapters.

I. Morality and Victorian Cultural Identity

As stated previously, Victorian cultural identity comes from being an extended enforcement of the English middle-class notion of morality on society and the nation, as instilled by Thomas Arnold early in the century. It is a set of middle-class principles that guided the everyday endeavour of an early Victorian, to the extent that his sense of church going, cultural pride, and the perception of domesticity and sexuality would all have been dictated by this unwritten code of social conduct and behaviour. This is not to say that the process was a conscious one. In fact, more often than not, most Victorians up till the 1850s would not have been consciously aware of the existence of such a force as exerted by the English middle-class morality on society. From the previous chapters, what I have demonstrated is how the four institutional forms of religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness exert their considerable influence on the Victorians' unconscious conception of society and identity, which hinges heavily on the middle-class's dictation of the concept of morality. As stated by Alan Donagan, morality is a system of codes that functions on society on a subconscious level, 'by which systems of mores, actual and possible, were to be judged and by which everybody ought to live, no matter what the mores of

his neighbors might be.'[1] It is by this principle that the Victorians' notion of middle-class morality should be defined. The Victorian concept of morality is deeply ingrained in the minds of Victorian novelists, such as Trollope, whose writings help us form a clearer definition of morality as perceived by the Victorians. Jane Nardin, in her study of the notion of morality in Trollope's novels, gives the following summary regarding the presence of morality in Victorian society:

> Victorian men and women learned about common morality in two ways: by means of theoretical instruction in its abstract principles ("Thou shalt not steal") and by means of the countless specific directives concerning conduct which interpret and apply those abstractions ("Give that back. It belongs to your sister."). Because common morality is both a practice and a set of abstractions that describe and guide that practice, one need not achieve complete mastery of its abstractions to fall under its sway. For ordinary Victorians, then, morality was not just a list of precepts defining right and wrong actions, but a deeply habitual disposition of conduct and judgement as well.[2]

The manifestation of middle-class morality on the four institutional cultural forms is central to the Victorians' idea of cultural identity. It rigidly and narrowly dictates the lives and choices of the Victorian public, but by doing so it also ensures conformity and unity in society. While Hegel has always been a severe critic of this form of cultural behaviour in Western society (regarding an uncompromising yet 'illegitimate' ideal of social morality, which he termed 'an empty formalism'),[3] in nineteenth century England, criticism towards such an 'empty formalism' did not become

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1 Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 1.
2 Jane Nardin, *Trollope and Moral Philosophy* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1996), p. 5.
3 The philosophy of Hegel in regard to the concept of morality is well examined by Alan Donagan in his above cited work; as well as W. H. Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics* (London: MacMillan, 1969).

conspicuous until the 1840s when William Whewell, observing the spread of anxiety in society's faith towards conventional morality, sensed the need to defend and argue for the undiminished importance of his middle-class morality. He writes in *Elements of Morality* (1845) that:

> Moral Rules exist necessarily; that they are necessary to the action of man as man; and that they result necessarily from the possession of Reason. From this it seems to follow, that moral Rules must be necessary truths, flowing from the moral nature of man; and that therefore, like other necessary truths, they must be universal and unchangeable.[4]

Whewell's argument not only illustrates the eminent position occupied by the concept of morality in the hearts of many Victorians, but it also exposes a growing sense of anxiety towards this notion of morality, which prompted Whewell's attempt to justify it in this work. Towards the following decade, however, industrialisation and the rapid expansion of the British Empire would ensure the growth of discrepancy between the Victorians and their traditional sense of morality. The 1850s is consequently a period of struggle between the traditional ideal of morality and the mid-century sense of alienation from the concept. This prompted the emergence of sceptics such as Henry Sidgwick, who criticises heavily the conventionally institutionalised idea of morality and its 'simple assumption that there is something under any given circumstances which it is right [...] to do, and that this may be known'.[5] Sidgwick's scepticism is reflected also in many of the new novels of the time, the theme of which being the involvement of doubt towards the conventional idea of morality.

Considering the pre-eminence of the concept of middle-class morality within the

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[4] William Whewell, *The Elements of Morality* (London: John W. Parker, 1845), I, p. 50.
[5] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (1874; London MacMillan, 1884), pp. v-vi.

overall structure of Victorian cultural identity, it is no surprise that its four main institutional forms are bound together accordingly to construe the image of cultural identity for nineteenth century Britain. The transformation which the four institutional forms have undergone from 1850-1870, however, made the Victorians question this 'code' of middle-class morality which they have always believed in. This leads to the dawning of the decadence spirit and signifies the completion of Victorian cultural identity. As stated earlier, in this chapter, I intend to draw upon what I have already examined in the reformulation of the four institutional forms to argue for the emergence of the critical spirit against conventional middle-class morality in the 1870s. The sense of pride which permeates Victorian society during the early 1850s and its eventual decline mark a good starting point for this study.

II. The Decline of Victorian Pride

The notion of pride is, in many ways, a crucial representation of the English middle-class morality by which the four institutional forms were identified and shaped. As discussed briefly in the introduction, the Victorian middle-class have a tendency to regard society's perceivably rapid development in various aspects (technology, imperialism, etc.) with a sense of permeating pride. This notion of pride, during the beginning of the century, had its foundation in the belief that Britain is the greatest nation in the world, which is a position that is both unshakable and indomitable. It is a spirit that epitomises the 1851 Great Exhibition, when the glories and achievement of Britain were literally put on display for both its citizens and foreigners to see (as reflected in Prince Albert's speech in 1851, see introduction). The rise of social criticism in the 1870s (such as in areas concerning the appalling living

conditions of the poor), however, has seemingly opened up a wound in this mentality, which is manifested in the conflict between the greatness of the nation and the corruption of this that is traditionally ignored by society. This trend began in the late 1840s and early 1850s when Henry Mayhew contributed a series of articles for the *Morning Chronicle*, which were later published as *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-1862). Prior to Mayhew, the issue of the 'condition of England' is already known and various reports on this problem, such as James P. Kay's *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes* (1832), Richard B. Howard's *An Inquiry into the Morbid Effects of Deficiency of Food* (1839), and Edwin Chadwick's monumental *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), were commissioned. However, the biggest difference between Mayhew's approach and those of his predecessors is that, instead of offering yet another report full of dry statistics, which aims to address the health issue of the city and the prevention of the spread of disease (such are the characteristics of these early reports), Mayhew had chosen to portray his subject (the poor of London) as flesh and blood and *not* numerical statistics. As a result, unlike the early reports which were read by few outside of the medical and governmental circle, Mayhew's accounts appealed to the general public and attracted wide readership. The result of this, along with his sympathetic approach, is that readers were able to better understand the situation, and perceive the extent of the problem based on factual problems which the poor had to face on a daily basis. In many ways, Mayhew's criticism of London's social problem can be understood as a direct attack on the superficiality of Victorian pride. Not only was he the first to open the public's eyes to the true state of the horror of Merry England, but he also seeks to critically condemn his readers for their ignorance. In his preface to *London Labour and the London Poor*, for instance, he condemns the Victorians:

It is curious, moreover, as supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth – the government population returns not even numbering them the inhabitants of the kingdom [...] My earnest hope is that the book may serve to give the rich a more intimate knowledge of the sufferings [...] and cause those who are in "high places," and those of whom much is expected, to bestir themselves to improve the condition of a class of people whose misery, ignorance, and vice, amidst all the wealth and great knowledge of "the first city in the world", is, to say the least, a national disgrace to us.[6]

The tone of accusation in Mayhew is unmistakable and his finger was directly pointing at those in 'high places' where 'much is expected', who aggravate the situation by doing nothing. Although whether Mayhew's writing had accomplished anything in terms of improving the conditions of the working class is debatable, the Victorian pride was visibly shaken after its publication. One of the biggest contributions of *London Labour and the London Poor* is that it had made the Victorian public question their sense of pride that, they now realised, incorporated only a selective section of society. Evidence of this can be found in the immediate reactions expressed by some of Mayhew's readers which revealed shock and disbelief, as if the world around them has suddenly became an alien one, and its citizens no longer relatable to ideas such as morality, pride, and duty. Thackeray, for example, feels that:

> But what I note, what I marvel at, what I acknowledge, what I am ashamed of, what is

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[6] Henry Mayhew, preface to *London Labour and the London Poor*, intro. John D. Rosenberg (1851; New York: Dover, 1968), I, pp. xv-xvi.

contrary to Christian morals, manly modesty and honesty, and to the national well-being, is that there should be that immense social distinction between the well-dressed classes (as, if you will permit me, we will call ourselves) and our brethren and sisters in the fustian jackets and pattens [...] the griefs, struggles, strange adventures here depicted exceed anything that any of us could imagine. Yes; and these wonders and terrors have been lying by your door and mine ever since we had a door of our own. We had but to go to a hundred yards off and see for ourselves, but we never did.[7]

And similarly, Douglas Jerrold expressed an almost identical feeling of shame in his culture, society, and nation, as he professed:

> We live in a mockery of Christianity that, with the thought of its hypocrisy, makes me sick. We know nothing of this terrible life that is about us – us, in our smug respectability. To read of the suffering of one class, and the avarice, the tyranny, the pocket cannibalism of the other, makes one almost wonder that the world should go on [...] And when we see the spires of pleasant churches pointing to Heaven, and are told – paying thousands to Bishops for the glad intelligence – that we are Christians! the cant of this country is enough to poison the atmosphere.[8]

Two of the more surprising sentiments that are expressed in the feelings of both Thackeray and Jerrold are their shame and anger towards society, which they perceive as a sense of betrayal. It is clear that they both felt deceived by the contemporary spirit which, although relentlessly praising the English characteristics of 'manly

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[7] William Makepeace Thackeray, 'Waiting at the Station', *Punch*, 18 (1850), 92-93 (p. 93).
[8] Charles Clarke & Mary Cowden, *Recollections of Writers* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1878), pp. 290-291.

modesty and honesty', was in reality wilfully ignoring a problem that was growing within itself (the publication year of the first volume of *London Labour and London Poor* coincides with the Great Exhibition). This sentiment which is expressed by Thackeray and Jerrold represents their lamentation of society's own blindness, in so easily committing itself to the Arnoldian perception of the Victorian culture. It is a feeling that was undoubtedly gaining prominence in mid-Victorian society in general, and this further widens the gap between conventional Victorian cultural identity and the contemporary social atmosphere. In an article written in 1857, for instance, the following statements are found which further strengthen the cause first expounded by Mayhew a few years earlier:

> The pity of it is not that [young girls] were flogged, but that there should have existed in the metropolis of Christian England a system of so depraving a character, as that young girls should grow up under it, lost to all sense of shame, coarse and blasphemous in speech, in action violent and pugnacious, with nothing maidenly, nothing womanly about them, except the name and the attire they disgrace.[9]

Indeed, as this article has clearly summarised, the shock that society experienced from this is sometimes not so much the brutal treatment of the poor, but the fact that such disgraces would, and could, exist in the moralistic 'Christian England'. Feelings of such kind lead to inevitable doubt towards the traditional view of Victorian cultural identity. In this regard, Mayhew's greatest contribution probably lies in the fact that he had successfully made society aware of the vanity and flaws of their middle-class mentality, which tends to ignore the less-glamorous problems of its cities. By opening the public's eye to the poverty of England, Mayhew was able to expose the very

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[9] 'The Employment of Women', *North British Review*, 26 (1857), 291-338 (p. 299).

problem of the Victorian middle-class pride, thus leading society to question the essence of their presumptuous cultural image. Although as other studies have already shown, prior to Mayhew, the theme of the 'two nations' (the two worlds between the rich and the poor) has already been a steadily flourishing genre in the novels of the time,[10] Mayhew's importance is not diminished because, as the Leavises argued, Mayhew's studies in the *Morning Chronicles* were immensely important in providing later social novels (like Dickens's) with the stamp of legitimacy which elevated them from fictions to reality. This, in a sense, is what differentiates the doubts of the 1850s from those of a decade before – that the feeling of urgency is both more real and more troubling. The problem, for perhaps the first time, has become truly comprehensible to the public and many began to fear it. From the early 1850s onwards, attention paid to 'the condition of England' indeed escalated and numerous social novels and reports, both owing a great deal in style and structure to Mayhew, emerged rapidly. Besides *Bleak House*, Augustus Mayhew's *Paved with Gold* (1857), G. A. Sala's *Twice Round the Clock* (1859), James Greenwood's *The Seven Curses of London* (1869), and to a lesser extent George Eliot's *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866) and Charles Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* (1870), can all be seen as direct descendents of a genre of work pioneered by Henry Mayhew; while other writers such as D. G. Rossetti in 'Jenny' (1847), George Meredith in 'London by Lamplight' (1851), and Elizabeth Gaskell in *Ruth* (1853) and *North and South* (1855), turned their literary attention to portraying individuals who lived and suffered under such conditions. It is through works as such that the 'condition of England' question was able to eventually reach a much larger audience, presenting them with an image that contradicts the idealistic middle-class conceptualisation of contemporary society, which prompted the re-examination of

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[10] For instance, see Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the 1840s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954); and Sheila M. Smith, *The Other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

Victorian cultural identity as a whole.

When Harriet Beecher Stowe visited England in 1853, she could not help but notice that:

> Fashionable literature now arrays itself on the site of the working classes. The current of novel-writing is reversed. Instead of milliners and chambermaids being bewitched with the adventures of countesses and dukes, we now have fine lords and ladies hanging enchanted over the history of John the Carrier, with his little Dot, dropping sympathetic tears into little Charles's wash-tub, and pursuing the fortunes of a dressmaker's apprentice[11]

As Stowe points out, Victorian literature prior to and after Mayhew is easily recognisable in their recognition of the condition of the poor. Walter Houghton, when trying to summarise the general mood regarding Victorian cultural identity during the mid-century, believes that the Victorians could be justifiably labelled cultural hypocrites, in the sense that:

> [T]hey pretended to be better than they were [...] They shut their eyes to whatever was ugly or unpleasant and pretended it didn't exist. Conformity, moral pretension, and evasion – those are the hallmarks of Victorians hypocrisy.[12]

From the beginning of the century to the early 1850s, as Britain's imperial strength continues to gain momentum and technology continues to improve, the Victorians were indeed guilty of being ignorant of their own flaws. However, after the 1850s, as

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[11] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (London: Samson Low, Son & Co., 1854), p. 185.
[12] Houghton, p. 395.

the works of Mayhew and others began exposing to the public the previously hidden and horrific nature of society, a feeling of doubt and concern regarding the conventional identity based on pride and gratification (not unlike its religious counterpart) would emerge prompting questions about the self-image of Victorian culture. This represents Mayhew's contribution to the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. Leslie Stephen, for example, recorded in the following statement that:

> The change which takes place, is not, in fact, an abandonment of beliefs seriously held and firmly implanted in the mind, but a gradual recognition of the truth that you never really held them.[13]

As Stephen remarks, the public attitude of the late Victorians has undeniably shifted from previously having firm conviction in their social pride, to perceiving cultural identity as something that is less tangible, certain, and most likely less moralistic as well. Thomas Hardy illustrates this spirit in 'In Tenebris – II' by writing that:

> When the clouds' swoln bosoms echo back the
>
> shouts of the many and strong
>
> That things are all as they best may be, save
>
> a few to be right ere long,
>
> And my eyes have not the vision in them to
>
> discern what to these is so clear,
>
> The blot seems straightway in me alone; one

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[13] Leslie Stephen, 'An Apology for Plainspeaking', in *Essays on Freethinking and Plainspeaking* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1907), pp. 369-410 (p. 375).

better he were not here.[14]

Although the poem was not published until much later, it nonetheless offers a true picture of the general atmosphere of Hardy's youth during the 1860s and 70s. The tone of the poem which suggests murkiness, uncertainty, and chaos, are all reflections of the identity crisis of the time, which echo the loss of conventional pride and morality in Englishness. In one of Kingsley's contemporary sermons, this same feeling is once again reminiscent:

> It is most sad, but most certain [...] that we too have made up our mind that we can serve God and Mammon at once; that the very classes among us who are most utterly given up to money-making, are the very classes which, in all denominations, make the loudest religious profession; that our churches and chapels are crowded on Sundays by people whose souls are set, the whole week through, upon gain and nothing but gain.[15]

By accusing the 'money-making' middle-class and denouncing them for verbally making 'the loudest religious profession' yet neglecting their moral duty by allowing the poor to suffer, Kingsley is urging the entire society to return to its moralistic roots and start re-practising its fundamental Arnoldian values (such as duty) which construe the image of Englishness. The magnitude of the shadow cast by Mayhew on Victorian cultural identity is great indeed, in the sense that it was able to force obstinate middle-class conservatives like Kingsley to acknowledge the disjunction between the perception and reality of his contemporary society. Before Mayhew, the public spirit was one that is so overwhelmed by the English pride, that the success of the nation

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[14] Thomas Hardy, 'In Tenebris – II', 1-8.
[15] Charles Kingsley, 'Sermon 26: God and Mammon', in *Westminster Sermons* (1874; London: MacMillan, 1890), pp. 293-294.

has masked its serious flaws. After Mayhew, however, as can be seen in the writings of Hardy and Kingsley, Victorian society soon began to question itself in terms of its ethic and morality, and even consider issues such as the loss of its conventional middle-class identity and the future of the culture and the nation.

The difference between the attitudes of Hardy and Kingsley lies in their respective optimism and pessimism, which can perhaps be explained by the time difference between their writing careers. Kingsley was active as a writer mainly during the 1850s-70s, at a time when doubts concerning cultural identity were just beginning to emerge, which explains why he seemed so keen on salvaging the Victorians' sense of pride. Thomas Hardy, however, wrote at a time when the conventional middle-class Victorian identity had already drastically receded, and the concern of the time was about trying to define the 'real' Victorian identity rather than to revive the concept in its conventional form. In *Yeast: A Problem* (1851), for example, Kingsley writes that 'we are bound to see everything in its ideal – not as it is, but as it ought to be, and will be, when the vices of this pitiful civilized world are exploded.'[16] This shows that despite the recognition of the less-than-ideal Victorian culture (triggered by Mayhew and the downfall of Victorian pride), there nonetheless remains a perceivable sense of optimism which urges society to be better than it is, to strive for the ideal rather than to pretend to be living one. And by contrasting this attitude with those of the early 1850s where only the echoes of Prince Albert's proud speech can be detected, the changing mentality of society regarding cultural identity and cultural pride becomes obvious.

As the Victorians struggled to acknowledge the dissolution of their traditional middle-class morality and pride, two situations manifested themselves in the Victorians' psyche. The first of these is the feeling of public 'Nostalgia', which

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[16] Charles Kingsley, *Yeast: A Problem* (London: J. W. Parker, 1851), p. 75.

occurred in the late 1850s. When the Victorians were initially forced to face the immoral side of society they could not be proud of, many turned towards the glorious 'moral' past with nostalgic feelings. However, as the years wore on, and as the Victorians were forced to come to terms with the fact that the glorious past is no longer possible, writers in the latter half of the nineteenth century expressed their struggle to face the immoral aspect of society. This becomes the second phenomenon which I shall refer to and discuss later is the 'Divided Self'.

III. The Nostalgia of Victorian England

In this section, I turn my attention to the depiction of nostalgic England in the literature and art of the mid-nineteenth century, which not only demonstrate the psychological alienation of contemporary Victorians from their traditional image of themselves, but also their nostalgic conjurations that can be interpreted as a symbolical utopia that is no longer achievable in the modern world. The Victorian age is on one hand exemplified by a sense of pride in the progressive strides made by the nation in its industrial transformation, but on the other hand there also loomed a heavy sentiment of nostalgia, especially during and after the 1850s, when the social feeling was one that regretted the passing of the old and regarded the industrial revolution with uncertainties and even hostility. Tennyson, for instance, in his composition of the *Idylls of the King* during the 1850s to early 1870s, uses the Arthurian myth as a reflection of a utopian ideal that is lost forever to the modern world. The *Idylls*, as a result, were completely void of the sense of spiritual struggle that classified the earlier 'Maud' and *In Memoriam*, because their purpose was specifically to remove oneself from this sense of identity crisis to return to a time when everything was simple and

passive, in which the feeling of pain and uncertainty which modern thinkers like Tennyson had unwillingly found himself experiencing (see Chapter 1), were unknown.

There are mainly two points regarding the *Idylls* which point to their cultural significance. The first is that unlike many of the poems of Tennyson's canon, the composition of the *Idylls* spanned more than several decades. However, after the publication of its first instalment – 'Morte d'Arthur' – in 1842, all work on the poems seemed to have come to a stop as the poet turned his attention to his uncertainty and doubt as reflected in *In Memoriam*. The reason, aside from the fact that Tennyson perhaps never intended the *Idylls* to be an epic, is no doubt due to the rise of the spirit of social discontent regarding religion and cultural identity, which we have discussed already. The interesting thing, however, is that after the unrest of the 1850s, Tennyson not only decided to return to the fairy tale idea of his youth, but was able to achieve in the later verses the same tone of peace and tranquillity that echoes 'Morte d'Arthur' with perfection. It is as if everything were written immediately after the first idyll and the sense of doubt which affected the poet so deeply in the 1850s had never taken place. This uniqueness of the *Idylls* would go on to mystify many of Tennyson's contemporaries. Most of them found it disappointing that the post-1850 *Idylls* distinctly lacked the strong emotional outpouring that classified *In Memoriam* and 'Maud'. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for instance, admitted her frustration to a friend in 1859 that:

> But the *Idylls*. Am I forced to admit that after the joy of receiving them, other joys fell short, rather? – That the work, as a whole, produced a feeling of disappointment? – It must be admitted, I fear [...] But whatever the cause, the effect was so. The colour, the temperature, the very music, left me cold. Here are exquisite things, but the whole did

not affect as a whole from Tennyson's hands.[17]

To which Allingham replied simply, 'I agree in not caring much about the "King's Idylls" feeling, at best, like a man who got rich, and had *two* puddings o'Sunday'[18]. Indeed, after having seen the depiction of identity anxiety and insecurity in *In Memoriam* and 'Maud', which was shared by contemporary Victorians, the readers of the *Idylls* were no doubt looking for more of the same thing, only to be left disappointed in the end. Matthew Arnold summarises this public discontent towards the *Idylls* in a letter to Elphinstone Grant Duff as follows:

> I have waited to read Tennyson's new idyll, hearing it was not very good, and thinking Mrs Grant Duff's reading would give it the goodness it has not; but I am afraid I must not hope to mend the poem in this way.[19]

Indeed, the seemingly unnaturally self-composed focus on the language of tranquillity and calmness which permeates throughout the *Idylls*, which many probably still find puzzling to this day, had in all likelihood cost Tennyson many admirers at the time. The fact that the *Idylls* can be so devoid of the intellectual flair and identity struggle that characterise 'Maud' and *In Memoriam*, in which the poet declared 'By faith and faith alone, embrace/Believing where we cannot prove',[20] is indeed baffling. But this brings up my second point of the *Idylls* being unique among the entire body of work of Tennyson. It is a twofold question that has to do with its unnatural concentration

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[17] 'Letter to W. Allingham, Feb 1859'. Quoted in Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), p. 268.
[18] William Allingham, *Letters from William Allingham to Mr. and Mrs. Browning* (n. s., 1914), p. 9.
[19] Matthew Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: Volume 4, 1871-1878*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (London: The University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 74.
[20] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Preface. 3-4.

and emphasis on the telling of a tranquil and picturesque story, which shows surprisingly little of the poet's own emotion regarding faith and cultural identity that had remained unresolved in *In Memoriam*. Firstly, what could have been Tennyson's motif in returning to a theme that he had began in the 1830s but abandoned halfway in the wake of his religious and identity crisis? And secondly, how could all those pain and sufferings that the poet went through during the 1850s vanish so cleanly and completely in the *Idylls* in which the poet's emotions were not even so much as hinted at? These are probably two common questions that readers would find themselves asking after reading the *Idylls*, but I want to suggest that rather than being devoid of the dilemma of cultural identity as perceived by Mrs. Browning and Matthew Arnold, Tennyson had simply chosen a more subtle way to depict those same feelings in the *Idylls*. Although this sentiment of lost and cultural uncertainty has no doubt found itself suddenly and drastically subdued in the *Idylls*, by what is in contrast a seemingly impassive Arthurian Camelot, the significant thing is that the *Idylls* do reflect profoundly the poet's conviction in his faith being the foundation of cultural identity, which is really the essence of the religious debate of *In Memoriam*. In 'The Coming of Arthur', for instance, Tennyson made it clear that in order for Arthur to be accepted as king, he must first convince the knights who 'fight for our fair father Christ'[21] that 'The King will follow Christ'.[22] Similarly, in 'Gareth and Lynette', Gareth's resolution was unmistakably attributed to his decision to 'follow the Christ, the King, / Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King'.[23] Such allusions to Arthur and his knights of faith provide a continuous undertone to the *Idylls*. This shows that although the perspectives may have altered, the *Idylls* nonetheless were

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[21] Tennyson, 'The Coming of Arthur', 509.
[22] Ibid., 499. According to Christopher Ricks, this line is a direct reference to *I Corinthians*, 11:1, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ'.
[23] Tennyson, 'Gareth and Lynette', 117-118.

able to continue and prolong the theme of religion and cultural identity that made *In Memoriam* powerful. By looking at the world of King Arthur as a utopia of cultural and religious harmony which the modern world so conspicuously lacks, Tennyson was able to maintain the identity debate of the age by portraying religious Camelot as a model utopia that corresponds to the conventionalists' middle-class ideal.

Tennyson's canonical *Idylls* can be divided into three sections, which chronicle respectively the rise of King Arthur, the beginning of trouble, and the eventual fall of Camelot.[24] Beginning with 'Balan and Balin', the second sub-section aims to bring a feeling of commotion and uncertainty to the court of the King and his idealized kingdom, which, upon close examination, actually reflects the identity crisis of the time thus further revealing the cultural tension of late-Victorian society. In 'Balan and Balin', for example, the dilemma of cultural identity as perceived by Tennyson is most profound, perhaps due to the fact that it was not written until 1886 when his sense of conventional cultural identity was already losing the fight to the decadent movement. Like so many contemporary works that deal with cultural identity (such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)), 'Balan and Balin' depicts a theme of duality which reflects cultural identity to be darker and more disturbing than previously thought possible. But even more so than *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dorian Gray* (which I will analyse in the next section), 'Balan and Balin' offers a precise and direct reason for this rise of dual-identity, which is attributed to the very pain he had experienced earlier in *In Memoriam* – doubt of Christianity. From the very outset, indeed, Tennyson was determined to portray Balan in a semi-religious context, and he bears resemblance to the poet of *In Memoriam* not only in his desire to pursue an established cultural ideal that is epitomised in Camelot, but also in his conspicuous failure to believe in it fully. The connection between

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[24] See Robert W. Hill Jr. (ed.), *Tennyson's Poetry* (London: Norton, 1999), 2nd edn., pp. 391-392.

Camelot and middle-class ideal of religion is furthermore exposed in the distinct parallel between the poet's quest for religious harmony and Balan's quest for Camelot (and the fact that both of them are ultimately unachievable). In Balan's own word:

> "Too high this mount of Camelot for me:
>
> These high-set courtesies are not for me.
>
> Shall I not rather prove the worse for these?
>
> Fierier and stormier from restraining, break
>
> Into some madness even before the Queen?"[25]

Balan's lamentation is reminiscent of Tennyson's struggle in the same sense as portrayed in *In Memoriam*, which illustrates the dilemma between conforming blindly to one's traditional belief, or resisting it so that one risks the lose of one's sense of identity. Despite his desire, it is clear that Balan is never able to fully align himself to (or convince himself of) his faith. It is furthermore important to note that, in spite of the struggle, the goodness and righteousness of Camelot remain strong in Balan, and that his doubt is never towards the goodness of Camelot, but only himself. This belief, however, is soon destroyed by his discovery of the liaison between Lancelot and the Queen, which tarnishes the image of Camelot forever:

> She lied with ease; but horror-stricken he,
>
> Remembering that dark bower at Camelot,
>
> Breathed in a dismal whisper 'It is truth.' (522-524)

At this point, what is being revealed to readers is not simply Balan's grief, but the true

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[25] Tennyson, 'Balan and Balin', 221-225. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

nature of Camelot which resembles a 'dark bower'. This implies the nature of this chaos to be something that has always existed in itself, which has always been ignored by the mass. It is no doubt a feeling that mimics the identity crisis of the day.

As soon as Balan's faith is lost, readers begin to observe a physical and mental deterioration of this once noble knight, which once more suggests the corruption of the conventional Victorian middle-class ideal of virtue and morality. Balan's transformation into a bestial figure is described by the poet as a 'Savage among savage woods' (497), who is capable of screeching out 'weird yell' (535) that is 'Unearthlier than all shriek of bird and beast' (536). In other words, what Tennyson is making clear is that the loss of faith is a process that leads to the loss of one's identity (in terms of humanity and culture). Balan's deterioration eventually reaches a point that makes him unrecognisable even to his twin brother, who mistakes him for the biblical 'demon of the woods' (128) and slays him with his own hands. The poet's depiction of this episode reveals his mixed perception of the contemporary cultural dilemma. The traditional black-and-white notion of absolute good and evil, which divides men and beasts, is now perceived to be vague and no longer easily distinguishable. It is an interpretation that parallels the contemporary social atmosphere, in the sense that, following the loss of absolute morality in Victorian cultural identity, society is now understood to be moral and immoral at the same time. The portrayal of the twins seems to further imply that evil does not come from any external sources, but stems from within oneself. In other words, if the moral man and immoral beast are both manifestations of the same entity to begin with, then the only thing that helps distinguish the two is faith and faith alone. The *Idylls*, in other words, not only exposes the post-1870 cultural debate in its depiction of Balan's loss of identity, but it further traces the source of this problem to the institutional form of religion, and reflects the poet's struggle between the undeniable chaos of the time and

his inability to depart from his Arnoldian roots.

After 'Balan and Balin', the *Idylls* continues its dark theme and departs further from the optimistic picture of Camelot being a kingdom of unquestionable faith. Following the discovery of the unlawful relationship between Lancelot and the Queen, nobility, religion, along with the rest of the Victorian middle-class ideals with which Camelot had previously been associated, become lost and irrecoverable. For example, in 'Merlin and Vivien', the portrayal of Vivien is reflective of an immoral Guinevere, which further suggests a sense of ambiguous duality between good and evil within the same entity. Vivien's seduction of Merlin not only anticipates the downfall of Arthur's kingdom (which Merlin is an inseparable part of), but also hints at an innate flaw in Camelot. Readers are encouraged to question the difference between Vivien and Guinevere, whom they now see as the mirror images of each other, except for the fact that Guinevere pretends to be moralistic and Vivien does not. This implies once again the contemporary cultural debate which blurs the line between morality and immorality. After 'Lancelot and Elaine' and 'The Holy Grail', where this pattern of decay against Camelot continues, 'Pelleas and Ettarre' summarises the reason for this decay by brutally bringing into light Camelot's moralistic pretence. Although the poem starts out in the archetypical fashion of Arthurian legends, in which a young knight seeks to join the court of Camelot, a fatal flaw is soon revealed in that his motive is neither that of faith nor honour, but a veiled desire for glory and sexual gratification. The scene where Pelleas calls himself the Red Knight and stages a bestial parody to mock Arthur and his Round Table marks the final decline of Arthur's utopian kingdom. Consequently, in 'The Last Tournament', when Arthur makes his last desperate effort to restore order and virtue to Camelot, his knights ignore their code of chivalry and mercilessly massacre their enemy.

The allegorical significance of the *Idylls* is that despite lacking emotional

outpours, they nonetheless confirm the cultural dilemma of the time, and further insinuate which by hinting at the impossibility of the re-achievement of conventional Victorian cultural identity in the modern world. When Arthur tries to recall how his kingdom had succumbed so easily in 'The Passing of Arthur', the final poem in the *Idylls*, he realises that he had placed his faith wrongly 'in wife and friend',[26] so that his 'realm / Reels back into the beast, and is no more' (25-26). The cultural implication is reminiscent of *In Memoriam*, in the perception that misguided faith, despite being noble in essence, nonetheless causes problems to culture and identity (much like the result of Arthur's misplaced faith in his religious kingdom). In the end, Arthur laments that God 'has forgotten me in my death' (27), thus summarising the hopelessness of the revival of conventional cultural identity.

As I have just shown, the *Idylls of the King* not only successfully maintains the cultural argument which first manifested in *In Memoriam*, but it further insinuates this by moving away from the optimism of *In Memoriam*, to better reflect the altered and somewhat hopeless situation of the pre-decadent society. Aside from Tennyson, since the beginning of the 1860s, there have been a number of works which similarly utilise the Arthurian theme to represent a lost identity. Debra N. Mancoff suggests that this revival of Arthurian legends in popular arts depicts the Victorians' imagination of Arthur not as 'an historical man but a metaphor, a means to express the idealism and aspiration of the present in the ennobling raiment of a glorious past'.[27] Thus, via its revival, society not only recognises the passing of their conventional identity, but also the chaos of their own time. The *Idylls*, like many of the contemporary works dealing with Arthurian mythologies, begins its depiction of Camelot in an angelic light which

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[26] Tennyson, 'The Passing of Arthur', 24. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[27] Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art* (London: Garland, 1990), pp. xvii & 103. See also Roger Simpson, *Camelot Regained: The Arthurian Revival and Tennyson 1800-1849* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1990).

parallels the supreme morality of conventional Victorian cultural identity. But at the same time, the poet was unable to ignore the changing social atmosphere which took place after the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity. The later poems clearly reflect as Camelot begins its descend into chaos. The divided self motif of 'Balan and Balin' further indicates society's struggle in coming to terms with the loss of its absolute morality, and the revelation of immorality within itself. I will now examine the different usage of this theme by other writers, and discuss their significance in their reflection of this late-Victorian cultural identity dilemma.

IV. The Divided Self

In late-Victorian literature, the struggle of the divided self motif lies in dealing with the emotional pain of having to navigate between the two polarising forces of good and evil. According to Masao Miyoshi, it is possible to read the post-1870 depiction of the divided self as a phenomenon that reflects society's sense of uncertainty after the reconfiguration of the four institutional forms, which manifests a sense of 'urgency to impose an order, a rational "solution" on the identity problem'.[28] Indeed, with the conventional moralistic image of Britishness being no longer valid in representing society, the concept of cultural identity is suddenly alien and indefinable. The cultural anxiety of the time is thus reflected in the divided self, which utilises the central idea of the co-existence of good and evil within one entity, thus illustrating the contemporary dilemma of being able to neither strengthen and enforce the good, nor dispel completely the evil.

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[28] Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (London: University of London Press, 1969), p. 161.

In Chapter 3, I already discussed how the nature of sensation novels can be read as a form of social critique, which involves the exposure of many of the 'darker' aspects of Victorian society. As Winifred Hughes points out, the theme of the divided self, which is also found in sensation novels, suggests a parallel 'preoccupation with the loss or duplication of identity'.[29] For example, in *The Woman in White*, the contrast between the lawful and the chaotic is sharply provided in the characterisation of Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick. If Laura represents the conventional ideal of Victorian womanhood who matches her prescribed identity of being obedient and respectful, then her counterpart Anne illustrates the opposite side of that ideal, both in her mysterious and unfeminine (hence uncharacteristic) quality. Similarly, in Franklin Blake's dual role as both the detective and the thief in *The Moonstone* (1868), a parallel identity is constructed which mimics society's 'discovery' of social problems and immorality.[30]

While the divided self in sensation novels reflects a form of distinctive social critique, other literature sometimes explores this theme as a process of revelation regarding society's hidden identity and anxiety, which usually manifests in the character's struggle to make sense of a conventional middle-class ideal that no longer fits into the social surroundings. In 'Empedocles on Etna' (1852), for example, Matthew Arnold was able to relate this feeling to that of the declining Greek civilisation, in which the separation between the contemporary and past is being painfully felt in the poem:

> No, thou are come too late, Empedocles!

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[29] Winifred Hughes, *Maniac*, p. 21.

[30] For more information on the interpretation of the theme of duality in sensation novels, please refer to Winifred Hughes, *Maniac*.

And the world hath the day, and must break thee,

Not thou the world. With men thou canst not live,

Their thoughts, their ways, their wishes, are not thine;

And being lonely thou are miserable,

For something has impair'd thy spirit's strength,

And dried its self-sufficing fount of joy.

Thou canst not live with men nor with thyself – [31]

In a sense, what this poem tries to depict is the inability to relate oneself to the modern world, and the pain which manifests from it. Empedocles's Greek, like modern Victorian society as interpreted by Arnold, are alike in the sense that they both suffer from a sense of moral decadence which makes the poet feel 'lonely' and 'miserable'. He can no longer relate himself to his surroundings because 'Their thoughts, their ways, their wishes, are not thine.' The state of this contemporary world is one which Arnold condemns for its decline in moralistic values, which:

The brave, impetuous heart yields everywhere

To the subtle, contriving head;

Great qualities are trodden down,

And littleness united

Is become invincible.[32]

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[31] Matthew Arnold, 'Empedocles on Etna', II. 16-23.
[32] Ibid., II. 90-94.

In many ways, the divided self of 'Empedocles on Etna' reflects a separation between the moralistic identity of the poet and the chaos of his time. The sense of forlornness which is depicted is one that echoes the state of cultural dilemma of late-Victorian society, in the realisation that society is seemingly forever separated from its conventional morally-imbued middle-class identity. Arnold's conservatism is insightful not only because he remains a keen observer of society's problem throughout this period, but also because he, under the tutelage of his father, identifies with the conventional Arnoldian identity better than anyone, which enables him to reflect upon this cultural dilemma in a profound and emotional manner. The influence of Thomas Arnold on the generation after his, especially those who studied directly under him in Rugby, is indeed monumental. For example, in William Arnold's biographical *Oakfield; or, Fellowship in the East* (1853), the author writes about his pain in departing Rugby and finding the contemporary world to be incompatible with many of Thomas Arnold's dogmatic moral ideals. He not only recalls his reason for leaving England to be that 'the insincerity of ordinary society and ordinary life became intolerable to him',[33] but also perceives the chaos of the modern world to be that: 'to most men the great objects in life are money or rank; and they call that position good in which they get much, and that bad in which they get little of these' (I, 75). In the end, he explains his complete frustration:

> I have comfort in reading of men who have, I suppose, had the same problem to solve in their time, and yet I cannot but feel that in no age has it been so difficult as it is for us now. For the Devil, in these days, has grown so confoundedly respectable, that it is

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[33] William D. Arnold, *Oakfield; or, Fellowship in the East*, intro. Kenneth Allott (1853; Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1973), I, p. 14. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

> impossible to denounce him in a shape that shall at once be recognised and allowed as evil. (I, 44)

The identity problem caused by the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, as perceived by William Arnold, is not only that the moralistic idea preached by his father is nowhere to be found in contemporary society, but that the elements of immorality which he equally condemns are actually being adopted by society as something 'confoundedly respectable'. In other words, under William Arnold's observation, the decadent atmosphere of late Victorian society is observably making its presence known. As stated earlier, the feeling of forlornness caused by the transition from moralistic Rugby to immoral reality is a sentiment shared by many of this generation. For example, when Thomas Arnold the younger shocked his family by announcing his plan to emigrate to New Zealand, he explained his decision to his mother in the following manner:

> [S]atisfy yourself that you may honestly defend an unrighteous cause, and then you may go to the Bar, and become distinguished, and perhaps in the end sway the counsels of the State; prove to yourself, by the soundest arguments which political economy can furnish, that you may lawfully keep several hundred men, women, and children at work for twelve hours a day in your unwholesome factory [...] while if you refuse to tamper in a single point of our integrity of your conscience, isolation awaits you [...] Yet in your loneliness you will be visited by consolations which the world knows not of; and you will feel that, if renunciation has separated you from the men of your own generation, it

has united you to the great company of just men throughout all past time.[34]

The feeling of 'loneliness' expressed by Thomas in this letter, is essentially identical to his younger brother's lamentation in *Oakfield*, as both of them originated from the same recognition of incompatibility between their moralistic ideal and the immoral world. Because Thomas Arnold the younger was unwilling to compromise his 'conscience', he decided he had to leave Victorian society to seek isolation.

To different extents, a parallel sentiment can be traced in the writings of all three Arnold brothers which I have discussed, in the sense that they all perceive themselves to be excluded from the immoral modern world by their conventional Arnoldian principles. However, in Arthur Hugh Clough, who was one of Thomas Arnold's highly regarded protégés, a variation of this feeling can be observed. Upon leaving Rugby, although Clough experienced a similar sense of contradiction and spiritual helplessness in the contemporary world, his pain comes not so much from the perception that the world has lost its Arnoldian moral integrity, but from his acknowledgement of the existence of immorality in himself, which made him question the moralistic preaching of his mentor. In an unfinished poetic drama titled 'Adam and Eve', Clough identifies his trouble to be an innate failure to live up to the Arnoldian ideal, which he reflects in the fallen Adam who, symbolically, had just been ejected from the holy land:

Adam. Since that last evening we have fallen indeed!

Yes we have fallen my Eve! Oh yes! –

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[34] Thomas Arnold, '16 March 1848', in *New Zealand Letters of Thomas Arnold the Younger*, ed. James Bertram (London: Oxford University Press for University of Auckland, 1966), p. 215.

One, two, and three, and four; – the appetite,

The enjoyment, the aftervoid, the thinking of it –

Specially the latter two, most specially the last.[35]

The cause Clough attributes to Adam's fall – 'the appetite' – is significant because it implies the poet's awareness of its having originated from the inside rather than the outside. He then goes on to connect that 'appetite' to 'enjoyment', and states that without this there would be 'aftervoid'. This, in a sense, represents his open acknowledgment of the pleasure of the immoral aspect of society, which makes Clough's pain more troublesome because, unlike Thomas Arnold's children, there is a willingness in him to consider and accept the public's attraction in such anti-Arnoldian activities. In Adam, thus, a distinct motif of the divided self emerges to reflect this inner struggle of his. This conflict between his moral and immoral longings is expressed in his guilt towards the struggle to maintain his Arnoldian moral standard:

Misery, oh my misery! O God, God!

How could I ever, ever, could I do it?

Whither am I come! where am !? O Me miserable!

My God, my God, that I were back with thee!

O fool! O fool! O irretrievable act![36]

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[35] 'Adam and Eve', I. 1-5.
[36] Ibid., II. 1-5.

Although the source of immorality to which Clough alludes is likely to have been a specific one: his secret sexual indulgence during his Oxford days,[37] the implicative power of his poem in relation to the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity is not diminished, because his struggle is nevertheless based on an inner struggle between conventional morality (Rugby) and contemporary immorality (Oxford), which is evocative of the identity dilemma of the age. It is a theme that Clough further explores in the psychologically revealing 'Dypsychus' (1858), in that:

> I am not quite in union with myself
>
> On this strange matter. I must needs confess
>
> Instinct turns instinct in and out; and thought
>
> Wheels round on thought.[38]

Unlike 'Adam and Eve', the premise of 'Dypsychus' is no longer about resisting the immoral desire to return to a moralistic self, but the realisation that the conventional Arnoldian morality is dead. The struggle, however, is that, although traditional morality is acknowledged to be flawed and unrepresentative, the thought of completely severing oneself from it is still too painful, thus a continuous battle is being waged between two polarising identities that it renders the poet powerless in either choosing or abandoning either completely:

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[37] Which, for obvious reasons, would be viewed as an unpardonably forbidden act from a strict, moralistic point of view such as Dr. Arnold's. In his diary during this time, a mark of a '*' would be put on the pages of the dates on which he committed masturbation, and this shows the remorse he always felt afterwards, and, at the same time, also the fact that he could not break away from this habit despite wanting to do so. For more information, see Arthur Hugh Clough, *The Oxford Diaries of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

[38] Arthur Hugh Clough, 'Dipsychus', I. 6. 133-135. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Let us look back on life; was any change,

Any now blest expansion, but at first

A pang, remorse-like, shot to the inmost seats

Of moral being? To do anything,

Distinct on any one thing to decide,

To leave the habitual and the old, and quit

The easy-chair of use and wont, seems crime

To the weak soul, forgetful how at first

Sitting down seemed so too. (II. 5. 43-51)

The pain and uncertainty of the struggle is indeed a vivid one. Throughout the conversation between Mephisto and the poet's consciousness, this feeling of a widening division between the fundamentals of the self and the preconceived identity of Dr. Arnold's morality continues to disturb. The result is that, in the end, neither identity becomes certain. Mephisto, as the representation of the 'other side' which the conventional Victorian morality aims to suppress, questions constantly the truth in the idea of a strictly moralistic self. He asks:

What is your logic? What's your theology?

Is it or is it not neology?

There's a great fault; you're this and that,

You here and there, and nothing flat.

Yet writing's golden word what is it

But the three syllables, 'explicit'[?]

Say if you cannot help it, less,

But what you do put, put express.

I fear that rule won't meet your feeling; (II. 1. 22-30)

Clough's feeling of doubt is greater than that of his contemporaries because the conflict that he is sensing is not simply one that exists between himself and the world, but one that is founded on the realisation of incompatibility between what he traditionally conceived himself to be, and what he eventually realises (but could not acknowledge) himself to be. Of all the children of Rugby, it is perhaps a feeling that only Matthew Arnold can come close to comprehending. I have already discussed how the cultural dilemma of the age is reflected in 'Empedocles on Etna'. In some of his other poems, however, a more personal struggle is often detected. In 'The Buried Life' (1852), for instance, aside from the feeling of isolation in being unable to relate society to its tradition, there was also a suggestion of the existence of something else in men that is different from the elements prescribed by the moralistic identity:

There rises an unspeakable desire

After the knowledge of our buried life;

A thirst to spend our fire and restless force

In tracking out our true, original course;

A longing to inquire

Into the mystery of this heart which beats

So wild, so deep in us – to know

Whence our lives come and where they go.[39]

Which echoes the songs of Callicles in 'Empedocles', in the sense that Empedocles is perceived to be:

'Tis not the times, 'tis not the sophists vex him;

There is some root of suffering in himself,

Some secret and unfollow'd vein of woe,

Which makes the time look black and sad to him.[40]

In these two verses, readers are able to sense not only the struggle of the age as an impassionate record, but also an emotive struggle within the poet himself who acknowledged both an 'unspeakable desire' and a 'buried life'. This makes the doubt of Arnold similar to that of Clough because he, too, was able to sense and attribute the root of incompatibility to an inner self which exists in everyone. This prompted in him a 'longing to inquire' into the exact nature of this true self, and explains why Clough detects in Empedocles a similar sense of doubt as in his Mephisto, which he understands as:

> [W]eary of misdirected effort, weary of imperfect thought, impatient of a life which appears to him a miserable failure, and incapable, as he conceives, of doing anything that shall be true to that proper interior self.[41]

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[39] Matthew Arnold, 'The Buried Life', 47-54.
[40] Arnold, 'Empedocles', I, 1, 150-154.
[41] Carl Dawson (ed.), *The Critical Heritage: Matthew Arnold – the Poetry* (London: Routledge &

Unlike Clough, however, the sense of self doubt and understanding of the hidden, inner self is never fully explored by Matthew Arnold (perhaps one might say he shunned it), who turns his attention to seek a compatible relationship between the modern world and the identity of the moralistic tradition, which he believes he found in *Culture and Anarchy* (see Chapter 4). For Clough, however, his journey would continue along the road of indecision and doubt between his perceived contradicting identities of the divided self, a dilemma which Lytton Strachey describes as an obsession with 'nothing but moral good, moral evil, moral influence, and moral responsibility.'[42] Although, when compared to the amount of scholarly attention being paid to Matthew Arnold, the work of Clough has not received much literary attention until recent years, the questioning attitude of his poems proved very influential to the thoughts of the later Victorians. Richard Hutton, in 1877, for instance, describes the influence of Clough as 'a poet [who] in some measure rediscovered, at all events realised, as few ever realised before, the enormous difficulty of finding the truth'.[43] Henry Sidgwick, likewise, pays Clough the following tribute:

> The truth is – if Clough had not lived and written, I should probably be now exactly where he was. I can neither adequately rationalise faith, nor reconcile faith and reason, nor suppress reason. But this is just the benefit of an utterly veracious man like Clough, that it is impossible for any one, however, sympathetic, to remain where he was.[44]

Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 71.

[42] Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (1918; London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), p. 201.

[43] Richard. H. Hutton, 'Walter Bagehot', *Fortnightly Review*, 22 (1877), 453-484 (pp. 467-468).

[44] Henry Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick: A Memoir*, ed. Arthur and Eleanor Sidgwick (London: MacMillan, 1906), p. 22.

In the years following the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, the more and more frequent depiction of the divided self does owe something to Clough, in that Clough openly questioned the supreme morality of conventional Arnoldian identity. The divided self motif presented in the writings of Thomas Hardy and George Gissing, for instance, is reminiscent of Clough in their exploration of the struggle between men's desire and the moralistic expectation of society.

To my analysis of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, the divided self of Clough is important because his struggle with the nature of this hidden self represents a bridge between Mayhew's revelation of immorality in society, which the public shunned, and the decadent fascination with it. It also marks the conflicting nature of Victorian cultural identity which society was beginning to come to terms with, in the sense that it illustrates not only a newly discovered consciousness regarding the moralistic identity of the past, but also shows the question regarding the fundamental role and concept of cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The revolution of the definition of Britishness began in 1827 with the appointment of Thomas Arnold as the headmaster of Rugby. Shortly after taking up the role, Arnold began his swift reformation of the English public school system, and his aim was as much about providing children with a good education, as it was about moulding their minds according to a precise definition of cultural identity. As Arnold himself admitted, the purpose of his reform is based on the belief that 'the unwieldy and utterly unorganized mass of our population requires to be thoroughly organized.'[1] He certainly succeeded in his goal. For the next decade and a half, Arnold was able to organise and control the mass by means of instilling into his pupils' minds a holistic identity which stresses his own rigid middle-class principles and convictions. The result of this was a remarkably sharp and efficient formation of a pre-ordained middle-class identity into the mass, which caused a few generations of Victorians to grow up conforming to it. This marked the creation of the myth of Victorian cultural identity, which represented a system of self-imposed censorship disguised as a representation of society. As Walter Bagehot observed, to grow up in the early Victorian era is similar to living under 'a permeating influence, and it exacts obedience to itself; it requires us to think other men's thoughts, to speak other men's words, to follow other men's habits.'[2] This course of cultural identity formation is further likened by Raymond Williams to that of the process of 'ancestor selection', in the sense that:

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[1] Thomas Arnold, 'Letter XVI' in *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold* (Westmead: Gregg International, 1971), p. 500.

[2] Walter Bagehot, *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St. John Stevas, intro. William Haley (London: The Economist, 1965), III, p. 5.

> We are seeking to define and consider one central principle: that of the essential relation, the true interaction, between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions, and institutions. *Culture is our name for this process and its results.*[3]

Williams's understanding of the cultural importance of 'relationships, conventions, and institutions', during the nineteenth century, is represented in the four institutional forms of religion, duty, domesticity and otherness, through which the Victorians conceptualise their cultural identity. It must be stressed, however, that despite the evidential connection between Victorian cultural identity and the four institutional forms, to the Victorian themselves, this association is not really obvious or detectable, but affects them in a subconscious way, so that the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity happens only as a by-product of contemporary scepticism towards the institutional forms (and their presupposed associations with the conventional interpretation of cultural identity). As a result, under the general canopy of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, contradictory receptions towards the reformulation of the four institutional forms are expected. Tennyson, for instance, feels emotionally drawn towards the contemporary religious anxieties, yet at the same time remains indifferent to the sensation novels' unconventional portrayal of femininity and domesticity. Christina Rossetti, meanwhile, recognises a problem in the way the Victorian middle-class ideal objectifies women, but through this remains a staunch supporter of her faith, for which she had broken off one marriage engagement and rejected another proposal.

The reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, therefore, must be

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[3] Williams, *Revolution*, p. 72. My italics.

recognised once more as not a conscious process or revolution by society, but a social, cultural, and historical phenomenon that happens naturally when old ideas became obsolete, prompting new ideas to emerge. This process of 'continual selection' of cultural association, as described by Williams, is exactly what happened from 1850 to 1870, when massive changes experienced by society begin to alter the Victorians' perception of their world, to the extent that the psychological niches which the four institutional forms had previously been associated with were no longer recognisable in the same context. Throughout this thesis, I have tried to demonstrate this change of perception of Victorian cultural identity by contrasting writings on similar subjects by earlier and post-1850 thinkers, in order to illustrate this remarkable shift of popular opinions.

Throughout the five chapters of this thesis, I try to demonstrate how the cultural consciousness of post-1850 Victorians shifted from an image of stability towards a path of rediscovery, from which the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity manifested. In *Victorian Subjects*, J. Hillis Miller describes this process as:

> [W]hen the elements that defines this conformity, such as religion, their sense of domesticity, and the belief in their cultural superiority were realised as faulty, the identity collapses and the search must begin again.[4]

Indeed, as I have argued, throughout the entire mid-Victorian period from 1850 to 1870, Victorian culture is very much immersed in an atmosphere of uncertainty, as it tries to rediscover and redefine its identity according to a changing and progressively complicated world. Statements that were made at the time, such as

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[4] J. Hillis Miller, *Victorian Subjects* (London : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 51.

John Stuart Mill's publicly professed knowledge the existence of 'a large body of received doctrine, covering nearly the whole field of the moral relations of man, and which no one thinks of questioning',[5] best summarise this awareness by the Victorians of their perceived cultural identity. It, furthermore, marks the beginning of the process of reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, where reiterations of this same cultural theme across a variety of literature confirm the view that the Victorians are going through a disgruntled period, both historically and culturally, in respect to their perceived identity. The public, who prior to this time had been living under and controlled by a set of middle-class dictated 'social formation', now not only gained better awareness of this fact, but also seek actively either to confirm or reject their conventional moralistic alignment with cultural identity. This is how the post-reconfiguration cultural debate comes into being in the first place.

In Chapter 5, I have demonstrated how the simultaneous anxiety suffered by the four institutional forms, during the 1850s and 1860s, brought society to a semi-chaotic environment. Not only were questions beginning to be asked of the traditional middle-class perception of culture and Englishness, but there was also a permeating sense of growing disillusionment with cultural identity, as conventional pride and morality began to falter along similar grounds. As has been stated elsewhere in this thesis, the notion of cultural supremacy, along with the four institutional forms, had always been regarded by the Victorians as a matter-of-fact authentication of their being and identity. Therefore when the myth of Englishness being a purely moralistic and virtuous identity begins to lose its credibility due to the uncovering of various 'immoral' social activities, the general

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[5] John Stuart Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', in *Essays of Politics and Culture*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1962), p. 19.

perception of cultural supremacy also suffered. Samuel Butler, in his satirical work *Erewhon* (1872), frankly portrays his contemporary society as one that not only fails to comply with its mythical code of morality, but points out that in reality it actually encourages the reverse by having an atmosphere that rewards greed and immorality. The mockery of Butler is best illustrated in his accusation of a man who is found guilty, not for cheating a widow of all her money, but for being caught. He parallels this dysfunctional society to that of contemporary Britain:

> [O]rdered a fine to the State of double the money embezzled; no food but bread and milk for six months, and a severe flogging once a month for twelve. I was surprised to see that no part of the fine was to be paid to the poor woman whose money had been embezzled, but on inquiry I learned that she would have been prosecuted in the Misplaced Confidence Court, if she had not escaped its clutches by dying shortly after she had discovered her loss.[6]

The satirical tone that permeates Butler's novel, which parallels Clough's sentiment in 'The Latest Decalogue' (see introduction), represents just one of the many examples that emerged during this period which illustrates a level of dissatisfaction with the presupposed moral respectability of the conventional English cultural identity. During the mid-nineteenth century, indeed, a rapid increase in public detachment from this traditional sense of untainted English morality is found. The fact that the concept of British supreme morality is being openly questioned is also easily detectable. This drastic shift of public opinion

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[6] Samuel Butler, *Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited*, intro. Lewis Mumford (1872/1901; New York: The Modern Library, 1955), pp. 97-98.

from the euphoric spirit of a decade ago can, in many ways, be attributed to the development of Victorian social criticism that had been slowly maturing since the 1830s.[7]

In this thesis, through examining a variety of texts of different genres from this period, I have sought to decipher and trace the development of this 'awareness' of the problem of conventional Victorian identity, as well as to examine its consequence in the building up of the 'rebellious' attitude of the decadence. My aim is to explore the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity in its full scope, beginning from the realisation of the flawed thinking behind its conventional middle-class ideal of cultural identity in the 50s, to the open decadence rebellion against this tradition in the *fin de siècle*. The decadence is proof that by the time the Victorian era was nearing its end, the awareness of this cultural discrepancy had not only spread across society, but the reconfiguration of cultural identity had in fact taken place. The fact that a publication like *The Yellow Book* was able to succeed, in spite of (or because of) its publisher's acknowledged intention 'to depart as far as may be from the bad old traditions of periodical literature',[8] is testimony of the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity, as well as its impact to the general self-perception of the public.

It should perhaps be stressed, however, that while the sense of having cultural identity defined by a collective consent, or imposition of a system of value on the mass, as found within the polity of society in Victorian Britain, is nothing new (Locke, for example, stated in as early as 1690 that that 'which begins and actually constitutes any political society, is nothing but the consent of

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[7] See Chapter 5 of this thesis, as well as David Roberts, *Victorians Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

[8] Fraser Harrison (ed.), *The Yellow Book* (Suffolk: Boydell, 1982), p. 7.

any number of freemen.');[9] as I have demonstrated in this thesis, the reconfiguration of Victorian cultural identity did not arise due to its problematic definition or formation, but the sense of gradual awareness which began after 1850 of the flawed makeup of this identity. This sense of 'awakening' marks the point of transition in terms of English literary, social, and cultural identity from its traditional 'Victorian' context to modernity. In many ways, this thesis represents an attempt to survey this dramatic change of perception of Victorian identity – from its early moral obsession to the utterly amoral decadence – by bringing together and focusing on the relationship between the simultaneous and coincidental reformulation of four middle-class institutional forms and the transitional Victorian cultural identity from 1850-1870. The original conceptualisation of this work appeared when I was considering the drastic cultural and literary difference between Victorian writings found in its earlier periods and the decadence era. The more I look at them, the more I realise what they represent are in fact two senses of an identical cultural identity, in which the earlier writings can be interpreted as a celebration of its manifestation, and their *fin de siècle* counterparts the signifier of its death with an unmistakable but unsuccessful longing for something new. While I have resigned to the fact that with a project that incorporates such a wide range of scope and magnitude, which ranges from religious issue to the position of the Empire (in relationship to otherness), it will be quite impossible to offer an in-depth analysis on any one of the specific areas (not that such studies can be considered rare, anyway); I am, however, content with the fact that what it inevitably has to sacrifice in elucidate detail, it makes up for in the resulting understanding of the interconnectivity

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[9] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (1690; Indianapolis, Hackett, 1980), p. 53.

between the four institutional forms of religion, duty, domesticity, and otherness (which had been unfairly overlooked by scholarship over the years), and their impact on the overall and original configuration of the image of middle-class morality as Victorian cultural identity. It is my hope that a study as such will contribute to our understanding not only of the cultural aspect of formation of national identities, but also from a literary perspective, of the intricate relationship between writings and cultural identity as well as the specific transformation of Victorian cultural identity and writings from its early days to its polarised manifestation during the Victorian decadence.

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